

## Without Guilt

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## Without Guilt

by [venus43](#)

### Summary

It's a honeyed tone, almost husky when the words drop—something that George doesn't think he's heard before, and he watches ivory teeth drag over black snake bites, fixated on the way a pink bottom lip moves hard with the metal piercing. It's hard not to stare, gaze lifting to dirty blond hair and a small smile, features so tantalizingly perfect that they render George breathless. Eyes widen, the boys smile growing, and Sapnap's brother was not meant to be hot, that was never a part of the plan.

or, george has a crush on his best friend's brother

# Chapter 1

## Chapter Notes

so.. new fic !!

this is full of just sexual tension and dream being hot i can't lie. i hope you enjoy !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

George is barely one step through Sapnap's door when he hears him.

It's not shocking, George has always known that Sapnap has a brother—he's been brought up countless times in meaningless conversation, details of the bitter trouble he's caused or the messes he's made always managing to find their way to George's (usually closed) ears. But in all honesty, George has never paid much attention, why would he?

It's Dream this, and Dream that, and although he's supposedly in George's grade there's still no face to go along with the purple laced name. Curiosity may spike at the mention of George coming over to spend a weekend with the illusive older brother, and George prays to whoever will listen that he isn't as much of an asshole as Sapnap says he is, because George may be good at holding his own, but dealing with jerks that don't know when to stop teasing isn't exactly enjoyable.

And it's nagging and nagging, and George telling Sapnap to fuck off because he simply doesn't want to, but in the end he agrees. George has never been good at self-restraint.

Sapnap's nice to him though (even if he isn't the best at listening), having picked George up off of the ground like a stray cat and forcing his friendship upon him, and George can grumble and moan—complain that it was completely unwarranted, that he was perfectly fine with being alone but they both know that it isn't true. And George will be silently grateful for the kindness for the rest of his life.

Loyalty has always been something that comes easily to George. There's a certain need to repay decency with something similar that snags on the back of his mind, and betraying a friend by messing with family is never going to be something that George would even consider. So why does all sense of reason seem to go out of the window as soon as he's face to face with the boy in Sapnap's front room?

"Sapnap," the guy calls in greeting, George's shoulders stiffening when he closes the door behind him and sneaks a glance towards the face speaking. "And a new friend?"

It's a honeyed tone, almost husky when the words drop—something that George doesn't think he's heard before, and he watches ivory teeth drag over black snake bites, fixated on the way a pink bottom lip moves hard with the metal piercing. It's hard not to stare, gaze lifting to dirty blond hair and a small smile, features so tantalizingly perfect that they render George breathless. Eyes widen, the boys smile growing, and Sapnap's brother was not meant to be hot, that was never a part of the plan.

Turning, George lets nervous eyes drift over to Sapnap's expression, the cower he's wearing managing to feel heavy. Though if there's any visible fear then Sapnap hasn't picked up on it.

“Yeah,” Sapnap shrugs, nodding towards the two of them. “Dream this is George, and George this is Dream, my brother.”

“Hi,” George says, lifting a cautious hand and trying not to let the telling tremble leak into his voice.

He’s attractive, that’s undeniable. Tall and blond and maybe George’s type too, and one of the first things that George really notices is that Dream doesn’t really look anything like Sapnap. Where Sapnap is short with wide shoulders, Dream towers over him with a leaner stature, where Sapnap’s smile is shy and mellow, Dream’s is larger and slightly more confident, and George doesn’t want to stare, he really doesn’t, but keeping his eyes away is difficult.

*Sapnap’s brother*, he scolds silently.

Red marks etch onto his skin where Dream’s eyes burn, the unchanging gaze hiding any of the emotion that George wants to pick up on, and his tongue dries with the wait to see if he’ll get a response and a second chance to hear that dulcet voice. Awkwardness sits stale in the air, George looking anywhere but at Dream to try and make himself feel better about it. But when he glances back it seems to be disinterest that he’s met with, no real way to see if he’s already managed to make a bad impression.

“We’ll be going to my room now,” Sapnap says decisively.

“Hey wait a second,” Dream interjects, “At least let me introduce myself properly, I barely even got a good look at your friend.” He keeps his eyes firmly trained on George’s, stealing precious attention with intrigue, “George, right?”

“Yeah,” George mumbles.

“*Dream*,” Sapnap warns.

“Relax.” A wave of the hand, coal black nails flashing in the air for a millisecond. Raising his eyebrows, Dream nods his head down a long halfway, the gesture clearly intended for Sapnap and not George. “Just go to your room, I’ll send him along when we’re done.”

It feels strange, magenta panic rising with the oddness, and the textbook that sits wrapped up in George’s arms seems to have weights on the back because his arms ache with the effort it takes to hold it up.

“Try not to scare him,” Sapnap says, pointedly ignoring the worried glance that’s shot in his direction.

Dream’s smile is wide, “No promises.”

Panic can flood George’s senses in the time it takes for Sapnap to disappear down the hallway, confusion mixed in even swirls in the same place. And the grin that Dream wears is terrifying, smug and confident with sharp, almost fanged teeth poking out.

For a few seconds there’s silence. Dream keeping his thoughts to himself while George forces his mouth to stay shut as to not say anything stupid, and he wants to make conversation, he really does, but Dream doesn’t seem like the type of guy he’d normally hang around with.

Blue nerves lace around George’s tongue, keeping him waiting for Dream to take initiative, but even when it happens George isn’t ready.

“What are you?” Dream asks, pausing his staring so that they can make proper eye contact. “A sophomore?”

“No,” George frowns, “I’m a senior.”

“As if,” Dream scoffs, as if the mere thought is ridiculous. And there’s a spark of anger that rises in George’s chest at the words. “I’m a senior, I would’ve seen you around.”

“I keep to myself,” George explains.

“Well what are you doing hanging around with Sapnap?” Dream questions, head tilted perfectly to the side. His hand moves to scratch at his nose, metal rings brushing over smooth barely tan skin and catching George’s attention before he shakes it off.

“Is this an interrogation?” George snaps, stiffening at his own harsh tone and glaring at the floor to avoid having to stare the mistake in the eye. “He’s my friend, asked if I wanted to come over to see his new gaming setup and help with homework.”

With a laugh on his lips, Dream flashes a small smile to the air—relaxed posture making it seem as though Dream is perfectly in his element while pushing George out of his. “How old are you Georgie?”

“It’s George,” he corrects, glaring. “And I’m 18.”

“Me too,” Dream says, that probing voice cutting through the air as though it’s paper, slicing tension with small, sharp blades. He’s chewing on his bottom lip, eyes running up and down George’s body with an unmatched hunger, forcing George’s nerves to spike and run black as he shifts under the piercing, green gaze.

It feels violating, like Dream is practically undressing him right then and there, no regard for the sinlessness etched onto George’s stature in the form of brown, wide eyes and the renaissance fingers that clutch onto a worn out textbook. And admittedly, George doesn’t mind the astute stare as much as he’s pretending too, with his attempt to look uninterested falling completely flat.

There should be an excuse to leave on his tongue— a reason why he shouldn’t be standing here and getting eye-fucked by Sapnap’s brother in their front room, and George thinks that he’ll blame it on how Dream catches his breath and keeps it locked away behind fearsome thoughts and unwarranted feelings later (although he’ll lie and say that those feelings are panic and nothing more).

“I should be going,” George breathes, pointing off in the direction that Sapnap had gone.

It comes out more choked than it was meant to, and the smile in Dream’s olive eyes is more than noticeable.

“Oh,” Dream murmurs, “Well don’t let me stop you.”

It’s a trap, it has to be. George can feel the annoyance bubbling up inside of him because Dream is the shattered, red sign that he has to stay away from. But the tug on his feet when he tries to step away barely makes that possible. His face burns hot with embarrassment, vivid blues on his fingertips as he clutches onto his textbook and nods, trying not to let the way Dream tugs a black piercing between his teeth and into his mouth get to his head.

There’s a knowing laugh in the air, Dream raising an eyebrow when George doesn’t make an immediate move and asking, “Are you going or..?”

“I am,” George chokes.

He doesn't look at the way Dream laughs and shakes his head, or the way his arms fold and painted fingernails clutch onto his forearms. And he definitely doesn't watch when Dream's tongue swipes out to wet his lower lip, pink strawberry looking so tormentingly sweet. Instead, George ducks his head down. He turns on his heel, tries not to let his shoes scrape on the ground as he treks towards Sapnap's room, hoping he knows where he's going because there's no chance on earth that he's turning around and asking.

It's a nice house, George has to admit. The hallways are long with colourful paintings framing each wall and there's a small cabinet that sits at the end between a nook that connects two rooms. From far away George can't quite see what sits on top, and most likely it's some family portrait that he won't care much for, so he doesn't try to sneak a glance at the objects anyway.

He's seen it all before, sure, but it's still nice to look.

Eventually, George pushes into Sapnap's room, eyes scanning over white bed sheets and disarrayed shoes and he swallows any of the tension he's been holding on his tongue, letting the back of his textbook hit the desk where Sapnap sits.

“You're red,” Sapnap comments, an accusing glare being thrown in George's direction.

“Shut up,” George scowls. “Show me the fucking setup.”

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George's American High School experience hasn't been a dream.

It's a lot of work, far more than he had expected. And it may partially be his own fault for picking out so many extracurriculars but he can't be shamed for wanting to do well. So if that means going to chess club instead of hanging out with friends, or talking to his English teacher in favour of the party that's apparently happening at Sapnap's house then that's perfectly fine.

And to top it all off, George doesn't think he's ever actually seen a game of “American Football” partially because he doesn't care and partially because he's missed out on every opportunity that he's been presented with. But even if he doesn't appreciate the sport, George can definitely appreciate the guys that play it.

He doesn't mean to look, but conveniently George's seat in AP calculus is right next to the large window that towers over the white marked field. His vision glares pink, oil painted fingers tapping on the edge of a faux oak desk as he watches sweaty hair and tight pants run laps in no real direction.

There's a certain familiarity to one of the players, Sapnap's brother running with sweat forming in small rivulets on his forehead, and George must've seen him before but for some reason it's an odd picture. He's far away, slightly blurred with the distance, but George can still find it in him to peek.

Breath fans out in short puffs, George's head propped up on one hand as he stares out at the group of sweaty guys all using the bottom of their shirts to wipe small drops off of their brows. Secretly, George's eyes scan over long legs, running over small bumps of muscle, and when his gaze finds Dream's face only to see a set of green fluorescence staring back, he can't stop the blush from rising to his cheeks.

Maybe George is feeling daring. He doesn't look away, the glass between them giving George the confidence to smile and carry on ogling Dream like there's nothing wrong with that. Pink can dust Dream's cheeks too, teeth poking out when he waves in George's direction as though he's not his brother's friend and that's not the last thing he should be doing.

There isn't a uniform on Dream's back, sticking tight to skin like moulded clay, in fact he doesn't look to be a part of the actual team at all, but it's still a sight to see. And the smile on Dream's lips is so delicate and flawless that George can't stop smiling at it being meant for him. There's grey confusion as to why it's directed towards him in the first place but George still takes in an arced hand with little thought.

It's as close to flirting as they can get without words. Immediate connection painted even in limelight swatches through visible rays, and George can't stop scrutinizing each frame that he sees, letting out a small laugh when Dream almost trips over a small mound of uneven grass.

He manages to do it with some flair, hands moving to the ground below and head tipping back with the edge of a wheeze on his lips, adam's apple poking out in a razor-edged, jugular breaths. And through it all, they manage to keep on looking, letting George almost imagine that Dream could be enamoured with him too.

Dream is attractive, is George's first thought.

And then it's the realisation that dawns on him that Dream is attractive.

George tears his eyes away before he can spend another moment on the thought, and he forces his head to face his desk just so no one else can see the crimson shade on his skin.

Dream cannot be hot, he's not dateable, he's not anything, and George should not be spending precious time staring at him when he should be paying attention to class, because family is off limits and smiles like that should be illegal. And as if to prove that point, the teacher at the front drags him back to sanity.

"George," a stern voice snaps, "Are you listening?"

Dazed, George looks up, "Yes," he mutters, "Sorry miss."

It's humiliation on his cheeks, confusion in his mind, and it could be pinned to just simple observation—George can see when someone's hot, he has the eyes to notice, but it's not as though he'll ever act on those thoughts. At face value Dream is attractive, simple as, but there's no possible way for those thoughts to go any further. He won't allow it.

Sapnap wouldn't either.

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George likes routine, it's always been that way.

He likes being able to know what he's doing, have an exact plan scratched up in his mind that can detail what step to take and which path to turn down at any given movement. But sometimes keeping up with those plans is stressful, and when stress comes in hard, angry waves George has never been the best at dealing with it. So when Sapnap forced his number into George's phone, barged his way into his life and gave George practically no out, gratitude came slowly.

Because for George, a friend like Sapnap is hard to come by. He's constant, supportive, and can pick the fights that George wouldn't dream of. And he values that friendship—doesn't know where he'd be without it—but George also knows boundaries. Like how he shouldn't call Sapnap before 7am unless it's for an emergency, how keeping secrets is frowned upon and any problems they have should be talked through so they don't end up in a screaming match over TeamSpeak one afternoon. But one thing that Sapnap has been abundantly clear about is how family is off limits—even though that should be obvious.

It's not that he thinks Dream's a bad guy, but nothing should get in the way of their friendship according to Sapnap, although there's no chance on earth that George would ever actually date someone like Dream and vice versa. Because that'd be weird, and George and Sapnap are like brothers, so going for Sapnap's actual brother would be even stranger.

And even if admitting it feels like swallowing hot rocks, George trusts Sapnap's judgement (albeit he's a little flaky at times). Which is why when George is being called over to the large table that sits on the outside of their school building, George lets all previous plans of going to spend his lunch in the library fall out of the window.

"George," Sapnap calls, loud voice ringing in the air as he leans up against the table with his palms flat on the surface. "Come sit."

It's gallous, commands George's attention even from the very other end of the site, and the small wave that he sends back in Sapnap's direction barely scrapes the same amount of energy. A hurry rushes through George's veins, the inside of his cheek being bitten down on by his own pearly whites. Holding his books in one hand, George attempts to smile as he makes his way over, scuffed shoes dragging over green grass with each small step.

The others at the table pay him no mind—the rest of his friends going about their day as they had before George had even arrived. And there's a certain irritance that bubbles up in George's fingertips at the feeling of being ignored. Lunch is only short, with all the classes he takes it has to be, so when his textbooks hit the table and he settles himself down opposite Sapnap on the bench, he can't really bring himself to pay attention.

"How was class?" Sapnap asks immediately, elbows on the table.

"Fine," George dismisses, "Couldn't concentrate."

A playful smile rests on Sapnap's lips, and sometimes George wonders how on earth he ever became friends with him.

"Why?" Sapnap asks, noting the bitter green glare stretched over George's expression but not relenting, "Aw, is someone grumpy because they didn't get their beauty sleep?"

"Fuck off."

"Wow, you're pissy today," Sapnap laughs, reaching over to grab the book in front of George and holding it open to let the mess of notes fall out of the bottom. They slip through the holes in the wooden table, pink and blue highlighted words dropping down onto the ground next to Sapnap's shoes, and the scoff that George lets out tells all. "C'mon lighten up a little."

A biting remark sits on the tip of George's tongue, mouth ready to start spewing harsh remarks about Sapnap's stupidity until the words are ripped away by a small chuckle from behind him.

"Don't be mean Sap," a honeyed voice says. And George's eyes can't help but widen.

“What are you doing here?” Sapnap asks.

Dream’s smirk is audible, and George doesn’t even have to turn around to see it plastered in the air above him. Everything’s crimson with panic, pretty piercings and dirty blond hair, and the royal-blue that overwhelms the surroundings makes George’s shoulders tense.

“It’s my lunch too,” Dream says, drifting around the table to scoop George’s notes up from the floor and push them in his direction. Calloused fingers press into George’s palm when the notes come back, and he meets Dream’s gaze for a second, keeping tension off of his face as he matches his smile. “Figured I’d stop and say hi before I leave.”

“Leave?” Sapnap questions.

“Yeah,” Dream shrugs, “I have friends to see.”

“Go meet them then, I don’t know why you’re suddenly deciding you want to hang out with us.”

“Whatever.”

There’s a laugh, and George can’t help but watch the way that Dream stands with his hands in his pockets and the bottom of his shirt rising up when that same hand goes to ruffle his own hair. The light hits him perfectly, skimming over his forehead and putting a golden glint in his eye. And George can’t believe that he’s never seen him other than today, because if he’s really in the same grade as someone who looks like Dream he’d surely have noticed them in passing.

“See you later Sap,” Dream laughs, breaking George’s train of thought. He turns to George with a grin, “And Sap’s friends.”

Silence hangs in the air for a moment, black piercings disappearing behind Dream’s cherry lips, and George doesn’t want to watch the action but he does, looking oh so mesmerised by nothing at all. A turn of the head, bruising eye contact being ripped away far too quickly. Dream’s hand finds Sapnap’s shoulder, giving him a small clap on the back before he pushes away and lets his back turn to face the table. And George doesn’t want to watch him walk away so he keeps his eyes fixed on his friends instead.

It’s only then that George can really notice the timid atmosphere, how the whole table had quietened and shrunk into themselves upon Dream’s arrival and for once he’s thankful to not be the only wimp in the group. Saddened blue lines dance through the sky, threading through the clouds and twirling around the notes in George’s hand. And he can see Dream’s fingerprints engraved onto the front in strawberry sherbet from where he touched it.

“Your brother’s scary,” Karl—the guy that always sits next to Sapnap—mumbles.

“Yeah,” George agrees. The feeling in his chest has to be fear and nothing more. “Scary.”

“No he’s not,” Sapnap scoffs, “You guys just don’t know him well enough, he’s like, a complete nerd.”

“He named himself *Dream*,” the guy on Sapnap’s left says—Quackity, George thinks his name is, he doesn’t really pay attention when he talks enough to know. “That’s prime douchebaggery,”

“It’s a Minecraft IGN,” Sapnap explains, “I swear he’s not that bad.”

“Sure,” Quackity laughs, “Not *that* bad.”



The notes in George's hands feel heavy. It's all information that he can barely even process because of how deep into his own thoughts he is. He lets his thumb trace over the edges, tongue clicking against his teeth when he tilts his head, and the feeling of Dream's fingers touching his feels burned into his skin, as though he can never forget it.

He wants to forget it though, he really does—get the image of yellow-green eyes out of his head, and not give a second thought to where Dream's going or who he spends his time with. But if he thinks about it hard enough, George can let reason overtake sickly sweet thoughts.

It's probably not the beginning of a crush. There's more of a chance of it being how he's never really had a good relationship and Dream manages to tick all the boxes of who he'd normally go for, so with the way he looks at him it'd already be difficult not to swoon. It's dark temptation, an attractive body wrapped up in something he can never touch, and George can't be guilt-ridden for almost succumbing.

But even if it was something unspeakable, George wouldn't be Dream's type anyway. Because from what he's heard, Dream likes someone a bit more flashy, someone a bit less withdrawn, and George is more of the type that can spend each night scrolling through random corners of the internet, a giant grey hoodie looped over his skin as he lets his reddened knees tuck up against his desk rather than making out with someone's brother in the back of an old car.

And to accompany that, George is sure that at one point, on some late night he will have stumbled across a less-than-trustworthy article detailing the complex relations between attraction and fear, the way that physiological reactions to scare can be mislabelled as arousal, or attraction or something romantic when it's definitely not. And the brain can misinterpret signals, thread red strings through hearts that shouldn't be there, and George wants to know if that's what's happening to him.

There's no attraction to Dream because he doesn't know Dream, he's Sapnap's brother (which is already a complete no-go) and that's it. Even if George did find him a bit attractive there's still no way that Dream would go for boys that spend half their time hunched over a computer screen, typing out broken code and not getting haircuts for months because they're scared of people not liking the change. So George hates himself for even thinking about it, chewing nervously on his bottom lip as he hums, repeating the facts to himself to get the fact that he can't have a crush on Dream through his head.

"I'm going to class," he says abruptly, hands slamming onto the table in a far-too-loud action.

With a frown on his lips, Sapnap turns to look at him, dragging Karl and Quackity's gaze along too. "So soon?"

Wordlessly, George nods. The cynical eyes all on him urge him for an explanation that he reluctantly gives: "I just want to get there early."

"Alright?" Sapnap shrugs, pushing the textbook back across the table for George to grab. "Are we still on for after school?"

"Oh," George mutters. In all honesty he'd completely forgotten about their plans, and the flat line of Sapnap's lips digs at his stomach to show he knows too.

"C'mon George, you promised," Sapnap grumbles.

"Yeah," Karl challenges, a teasing tone on the edge of his voice, "You promised."

“I don’t know if I can.”

“Don’t lie,” Sapnap cuts.

He rolls his eyes, letting boredom show on his expression and annoyance glimmer in umber eyes. Biting remarks clip the tip of George’s tongue but he doesn’t let them roll out, scowling with his hands curled tight around his books in front of his chest as he stares at Sapnap blankly. He’s not winning by any means, Sapnap’s own eyes showing resistance in narrowed pupils and pursed lips, and their staring match only gets longer as Karl and Quackity follow.

George is the first to look away. Huffing, he tears his gaze to the side, letting disappointment rise and angled shoulders slump.

“You’re coming,” Sapnap decides, not giving him a second to breathe, “And you’re going to have fun too.”

“Fine,” George mutters. “Can I go now?”

A nod of the head. “Bye George.”

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George gets intercepted on his way out of the building.

Grapevines crawl through his legs as he walks, red lockers and curved smiles plastered to the walls, and George knows that he won’t actually be able to sneak off and just run home but it doesn’t stop him from trying. There’s no one walking with him at first, his pace is fast, head is low, and it’d be a wonder if most of the people in his grade even knew his name considering the fact that he spends half his time with the grade below instead.

The red handle of his locker sits three hallways down, opposite to the windows that line the main exit, and George’s backpack sits light on his back with the absence of the books that sit in his palm. Featherlight steps make little noise, the toes of his shoes off-white and leaving invisible marks on the ground below. And he’s so close, only one hallway left to pass through when a clap on his back sends him reeling.

“George!” Sapnap exclaims, smiling widely as his words tumble out. “Where are you going?”

The effort it takes for George not to shove him over right then and there should be congratulated. “My locker.”

“No you’re not.”

“I am.”

Sapnap’s arm moves to rest atop his shoulders, hand curling around his neck and scraping over the collar of his shirt, oversized material hanging just off of his chest. “As if I’m going to let you run away.”

“I’m not running away,” George seethes, expression souring, “My locker is right there.”

“You’re slippery.” Sapnap says as though it explains it all. “And we’re catching a lift so we have to be quick.”

That catches George's attention. Eyebrows raise with concern, "A lift?" He asks, tone showcasing scrutiny with sharp edges.

"Yep," Sapnap says, popping the 'p', "Dream offered to drive us home."

"What?" George deadpans. The way his face pales must be comical, rosy red cheeks staining a translucent white with shock. His tongue touches the roof of his mouth, mind searching for words to pass through steel teeth they don't come.

"Yeah." Sapnap looks at him like he's made of gold, warmth in his eyes and a bright smile on his lips. "Isn't it great, no bus for us!"

"Your brother's never offered to drive us anywhere before."

Leaning in a little closer, Sapnap's head almost touches George's, freezing him with the unnecessary touch but George makes no real attempt to pull away; they've been friends long enough for George to be used to it. "Which is exactly why we aren't wasting time going to your locker," Sapnap explains, "We're being timely."

"Whatever," George shrugs.

The arm around his shoulders drags him to the side, leads him towards the exit with no room for objection. Grumbling to himself, George pushes his book underneath his arm and goes along with it, any complaints dying off in stale air with eyes falling down to the ground and boring into the walk with the hopes that somewhere along the way the path will crack. And the main belief he holds is that Dream driving them home is the worst possible thing that could be happening to them.

Avoid Dream at all costs—that's what George's brain yells at him. Cut off all contact before his mind can even wander over to the possible idea of a crush.

Spending time with Sapnap's (hot) older brother is an awful idea, like scraping nails over black chalkboards or grating porcelain white plates with the teeth of a fork, and there's no use voicing the issue because what would George even say? That he can't be around Dream because the partial interaction that they've had made his knees weak and George wants nothing more than to take that stupid lip piercing through his teeth and snap it back (maybe bite at plush pink lips while he's at it too).

Indecent thoughts are likely plastered over his face, and George is thankful that Sapnap is paying more attention to getting them to where they need to go rather than him because red-maraschino cheeks would give everything away in an instant. Wide doors guard the exit, the gates of hell shining bright with yellow and red flames and George gets pulled through them as though it's nothing.

It's a row of cars, half beaten to death and the other half still shiny with polish, and George doesn't quite know where he expects to see Dream, let alone Sapnap, but when he does finally see him somehow George isn't surprised. It's a typical car, nothing fancy but nothing too done under, and Karl and Quackity stand to the sides, arms crossed in waiting. .

"There," Sapnap says, pointing over in case George hasn't noticed yet. His tone must call Dream's attention too, because he glances up from where he's typing furiously on his phone to grin in their direction.

It makes George's heart patter although he hates to admit it. Unfortunately, Dream looks good. It's expected of course—Dream would probably look good in anything, and George has seen the outfit already but the way his mouth dries and breathing quickens still catches him off guard.

Angled features and smiling green eyes are all he can see, a rugged stature adorned with ropy clothes made from a material that George would probably be able to tear within seconds, and it's all barely strung together, black pieces mixing with greys and a green barely visible undershirt too, but it works and George can't look away.

"Calm down," Sapnap whispers, his eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "It's just a car ride, Dream's not going to hurt you."

There's a sick part of George that wishes he would.

"Oh, hey," Dream says once they get a little closer, leaning against his car with a hand in the air, "George, right?" It's a gentle tone, far more pleasant than George's startled glare that he's unable to keep off of his face. Sickly sweet strawberry drips from Dream's tongue, a brown strand of hair falling down over George's forehead and in front of one of his eyes, and he half-wonders how Dream's fingers would feel tracing over his skin if he brushed the piece back behind his ear.

Sapnap's brother, George reminds himself, he can't think like that.

"Yeah, that's me," George mumbles. He hates how quiet it comes out, words tumbling from his mouth like apples from trees, brash and cut short with the impact of them hitting the ground and rolling towards Dream with rounded edges.

"Cool," Dream smiles.

Calloused hands grab onto the car door, opening it up for Sapnap to sneak into the driver's seat to shuffle along to the next while rolling his eyes. And George moves to open the back too, Karl and Sapnap having gotten in somewhere in between them walking over and when they started talking to Dream, but his hand is knocked away by a larger one, metal rings causing ice to spill over his skin.

"I've got it," Dream smiles, the handle clicking open with a small snap. They don't make eye contact, George doesn't allow it, but he slinks into the seat next to Karl with his eyes turned down and a small flushed smile on his lips, trying not to let porcelain crack with newfound emotion.

His arm brushes up against Karl's, close proximity forcing them to be sitting almost on top of each other, but George doesn't mind it too much, twiddling his thumbs over covered legs.

"What's with you?" Karl asks, not having the sense to lower his voice so it isn't heard by the others. Dream slides into his seat in front of George, hands on the steering wheel, with George doing his best not to stare.

"What do you mean?" George asks quietly.

"You're like, blushing." As if to emphasise his point, Karl lifts a hand to point to George's face causing red to burn even brighter with embarrassment.

"No I'm not!" George exclaims, turning away.

Unsurprisingly, Karl doesn't take the hint, leaning forwards to watch where George's head moves with his mouth following, "Dude you are."

"Shut up," George snaps, and the chuckle from up front doesn't fall completely flat.

Rose lips curve into a smile in the rear view mirror, fanged teeth shaped into the same grin. And George watches it all with his own eyes hazy. It's attractive, and if Sapnap turned around he'd

definitely be able to see George's glazed over expression, maybe trace it back to Dream's too, but that so called loyalty is only at the back of George's mind, right now all he can think of is how good Dream looks when he's laughing.

There's the start of the car, engine jumping and rumbling lowly with the jerking movement, and the only way for them to get out from the spot is for Dream's head to turn to the side and his hand to rest on the head of Sapnap's seat—fingers flex with steel and metal joints, veins on the top that make George flush.

It's nothing sexual but it makes George react still, his breathing being forced out through his nose so he can stop himself from letting out an audible gasp. The tendons flash with green, tensing in front of George's eyes, and if he'd finally managed to get the pink blush off of his cheeks then it must be back by now, hysterical red seemingly engraved on pearl bones.

Umber eyes burn holes into Dream's forearm, glaring up at the peeks of skin. George brings his own hand to his face to hide a trembling lower lip. His elbow rests on the side next to the window, and silently George lets his thumb dip into his mouth, nail scratching over the colourless teeth inside. It may only be the tip but he still feels slightly dirty, feeling the car around him reverse before they can drive off, and when he tears his eyes away and looks into the mirror ahead the green eyes staring back at him makes him jump.

He doesn't look away; he keeps up the blackened eye contact and hopes that no one else can pick up on it. And it's not flirting but it feels like it—something unheard of and irresistible, but so dangerously wrong at the exact same time. It's spellbinding, as though Dream's caught him and won't let go. He isn't going against Sapnap's wishes, but there's still the fear that he will, like red laced ropes slowly tie him and Dream together with the threat of being unstuck drawing closer with each second.

Unsurprisingly, Dream looks away first, gaze fixing back on the road ahead, but George's frown is still unstopable, sticking to his face with an ugly sigh. The shoes on his feet dig into rough floors, toes pressing up against the top when he tries to move without making it too obvious. Red glass lines the mirror ahead, and upon closer inspection George can see the same shade on the heights of Dream's face, slightly paler but burning nonetheless.

*He's blushing*, George tries not to say. Quietly, his hands move to tuck underneath his legs, sliding under his thighs and holding them there to stop himself from shaking or barking out a laugh. Eyes averted, George plays with the material of his pants, hearing the tapping sound from next to him as the others fiddle about with their phones, no one really talking to each other apart from the occasional honed remark.

It feels like forever, the car rolling slowly down the road with a slight tension lingering in the closed air. Stealing glances at Dream through the fogged mirror feels like the only thing keeping George sane, and even though he promised himself he wouldn't, the fear in his stomach could bleed into something more at any given moment.

Nervous fingers play staccato with a clicking tongue, streets passing by in a blur of grey. And George wants to know what hole Dream must've crawled out of, because he's been to Sapnap's house before but somehow never managed to catch him, let alone see him in the long and narrow corridors of a school building. He can pin it down to his own reclusiveness, because no matter how much George can enjoy another's company he's never been one for standing out or paying attention, so the way he feels when Dream's eyes flick back up to bore into his makes him believe he's the only one around.

They stop rather quickly. The empty spot next to Sapnap's house gets replaced by Dream's car,

tires scratching black onto the road below, and when everyone clambers out they leave George sitting trying to collect his things, pensive.

His backpack gets strung along his shoulders, hands weighed down by textbooks that he wishes he'd had the chance to put away, and stupidly he goes to reach for the door, feeling the handle get pulled out from under him.

"Do you need help with that?" Dream asks, all widened eyes with an outstretched hand. He's holding the door open, the others standing by the house door, waiting, and George's head shakes immediately. He can't be accepting help from pretty boys that he should never have talked to in the first place.

"No," George says, blinking rapidly. "I'm fine,"

"I insist," Dream says, practically forcing the books out of George's hand. "Can't let you carry all of this on your own."

"I can manage," George frowns. He lets himself climb out of the car and follow along. "I've managed all day."

"Well you shouldn't have to."

Red-black flashes through olive eyes, pale neck craning to see George's barely composed demeanour as they approach the small open gate in front and there's a hint of a mulberry bite on the stretch of skin from Dream's collarbone to his jawline. It's peeking out from behind thin fabric with small purple stains lying around, looking so freshly placed that George can't bear to look for too long.

It shouldn't make his thoughts run wild but it does, adding yet another reason onto the list as to why this would never work out. Because even if George did like Dream (which wouldn't be him admitting to anything) Dream probably wants nothing to do with him—he has better options anyway.

The door's been left open, Karl, Quackity and Sapnap having taken the time to find their way in and set things down. He and Dream walk in silence, neither daring to utter a second word of recognition. And when they finally step in, George gives himself a second to breathe by pressing the door shut with the tremble of his hands against it.

"Where do you want these?" Dream asks, candied voice cutting sharp through George's thoughts.

It's dizzying, almost like a daydream., and he's not sure himself capable of breathing let alone speaking. "Anywhere will do," George chokes.

The nerves in his voice may come across as disdain, because Dream's put down look when George doesn't turn to face him speaks louder than anything else. And with a small hum, George lets himself walk through to meet the others again. He's barely uttered a word to Karl, barely spoken to Quackity other than the few times they've exchanged words over a lunch table, and the idea of being trapped here with them plus the guy who he's definitely not crushing on feels more stressful than anything else.

So when Karl wanders over and Dream doesn't move to dash towards his room, the only thing that George can feel is panic. It's yellow threads looping through the hem of his shirt, running over his chest and covering already covered arms with frenzy, George trying not to look in Dream's direction in fear of staring for too long.

By the time he's managed to work himself through it, confirm that he isn't going to blurt out some embarrassing monologue about how Dream's snakebites look good or his hair is perfectly styled, everything seems to have moved along. Karl's standing next to him with a small look and flying words, Quackity and Sapnap sitting down in a conversation that George doesn't want to weigh in on, and Dream's hands have found their way to his phone again, a message being typed with small taps.

There's curiosity of course but George doesn't act on it, watching black painted nails fly across the mostly white screen. And after a moment, Dream's head whips up again. "Alright," he greets, directing the words towards Sapnap. "I'll leave you guys to it then."

Humming, Dream turns to the others, nodding in their general direction before stepping back towards the door, and if he shoots George a wink then George pretends not to notice (or feel the way his knees buckle at the action), inhaling sharply and staring at the wall instead.

"When will you be back?" Sapnap asks. There's a tv remote in his hand, words floating idly as he flicks it on.

"Late," Dream says, his honeyed tone sounding less sweet now that he's going. "Don't wait up."

His eyes don't meet anyone else's but they try to find George's, green rings lined with black pencil making George's breathing quicken. *Stop*, he thinks to himself, *don't be pathetic*.

Pitifully, George listens to the click of the door, hearing wooden frames open before slamming shut with a small *thud*. And there's no honey in the air or pink ribbons dragging through invisible loops but there's a certain weight on his shoulders that's gone for now at the least.

Maybe Karl's talking to him, but George isn't listening. His arms are crossed in front of his chest, prying interest peaking in tall and sudden waves. The wonder is laughable, an unjustified nosiness making George feel dirty, and before he can stop himself he's turning to the front of the room, cutting off words with no regard for how they land, and asking, "Where's he going?"

Sapnap turns to him with a look he can't describe, "Not sure," he says, "I think he has a date or something."

Green tears through George's vision like a hurricane, a small shake to his posture when he pries the frown off of his lips. "A date?" George asks out of simple curiosity and nothing more.

"Yeah?" A shrug, as though this is a completely conventional occurrence. "Normal people go on dates, George, it's why you've never been on one."

"Are we talking about George's non-existent sex life?" Quackity chimes in, grinning eagerly.

It's an unexpected quip but the small laugh that bubbles from George's throat can't be stopped. And why on earth would he be caring about what Sapnap's brother is doing when he has a perfectly fine group of friends right in front of him? It's not like he has a crush on him, or they're dating or anything like that, so why should he care?

"Shut up," George snaps, no real bite to his tone. "Just make me a drink."

He stands by the entrance still, not moving to take a closer look into the room. And maybe Dream's jacket is folded over one of the chairs, tight black material that George doesn't find too ugly sitting in front of him, and if it's the same shade as the piercings in Dream's lips George pretends not to notice, turning instead to look out of the window by the door and out at the road where the car is starting to pull away—Dream on the way to his perfect little date.

Yet despairingly, there's the nagging feeling in George's chest that maybe having a crush wouldn't be too hopeless, because even if he's never been the best with signals, surely looks like that can't be misread.

Still, Dream is Sapnap's brother. And even worse, he has a date—probably a girlfriend too.

Boys like that should come with a warning label, George thinks—a ticket to the playboy mansion sitting in their back pocket to hand out when they're bored. And George has never had his heart broken, he's been careful enough to keep red arteries and powerful organs in a sealed off box, not on his sleeve but in his back pocket, so there's no way that he'll hand that box over to Sapnap's brother without a second thought—although if Dream were less attractive then that would be far easier.

The sound of Karl still talking to him resonates in thick air but George can't force himself to listen, his eyes fixed on the marks that the wheels of Dream's car have left on the road, and George *still* has never had his heart broken, but the pang he feels in his chest at the mention of Dream's date hurts all the same.

“George,” Sapnap calls, sitting on the couch with his legs up on the side. “Are you coming in or what?”

“I'm coming,” George says, tearing his eyes away from the spot.

He can't have his heart broken by Sapnap's brother if they never date, it's not even a plausible thing to happen.

Turning his head to the side, George forces a smile onto his lips, hands moving to slip into his pockets as he takes the second step towards the centre of the room, with the glare of a television screen lighting up around him.

It's not a crush.

## Chapter End Notes

comments and kudos are so appreciated !!

my [twitter](#)

plus a link to the [song](#) that made me want to write this



## Chapter 2

### Chapter Summary

It's a move so fundamentally wrong, when George takes a moment to think of the possibilities. He'd slept on it, let his thoughts be overcome with stupid infatuation, and an almost-crush shouldn't be what makes George stare at the black screen of his phone, closing his eyes to try and shake the thought that's running through his mind.

If there's no reason for him to call Sapnap's mobile then there's no real reason for him to be calling Sapnap's home number either.

### Chapter Notes

just want to preface that this entire work does have heavily suggestive themes revolving around sex and all that, and it does start to be explored more starting from here so just a quick warning for that !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sleepovers at Sapnap's house aren't exactly George's idea of fun.

It's talk for the most part, energy soaring high with sticky, sweet sugar then crashing down at the earlier moments of the day—when light is finally able to flicker gold through open blinds and Karl has passed out on Sapnap's floor with Quackity having resorted to watching a shitty movie on the monitor through quiet volume beside him.

Still, it's not to say George wouldn't do it again, because as long as he's asked he would. But it's still not *fun*.

It's around 1am when George hears the fall, everyone still awake and rearing off of orange exhaust while crowded together on the floor of Sapnap's room. Sound coasts through the air in a blur of nothingness, the hum of a screen flickering with the action displayed on top. Empty cups sit idle on the desk ahead, shaking with the speakers that jostle in wavering beats and pulse with each second. And the desk chair has been pushed to the side too, wheels rolling in place to keep vision clear.

George's head barely manages to stay up.

Somewhere along the way he'd pulled on a hoodie from Sapnap's closet, let dark material pool around his waist as he sits propped up against the wall next to Sapnap's bed, and he'd watched the playful glare thrown in his direction with a matched frown as Sapnap had complained about him being the only one in comfort.

At first it's just the slam of a door, wood cutting through sun-baked walls with frayed edges before clicking into place. George's interest dwindles with footsteps drawing closer, and initially he assumes that someone must've snuck out when he wasn't paying attention, stepped carefully to the

bathroom and is finally crawling back, but when he takes the time to scan over the cornered room, there's no hint of anyone's absence.

Then it's a giggle, high pitched and indelicate. Followed by a darker, more coarse laugh, two steps for every second and floorboards creaking with the walk. There's shushing, as though they don't want to be heard and an effeminate voice speaking slurred words that can't quite be made out. Honey trails behind in smaller strokes, illusions of hands on waists and lips pressed light against earlobes flashing small, unsavoury pictures in George's mind.

It's the stumbling up high stairs, an effort not to lose footing as laughs get louder and less refined, and George has to keep any opinion off of his face as it draws further away.

Humming to himself, George presses further against the wall, his fingers tangling together in the pocket of the hoodie and his head leaning against the cool surface. His eyes drift towards Sapnap, a question on his brow.

"It'll be Dream," Sapnap explains with a shrug. "Back from his date."

There's a cloud of peach, apricot-orange drifting through the cracks under the door and sitting tantalizingly sweet under George's nose.

"Someone's getting lucky tonight," Quackity drones, the edge of a wolf-whistle on his lips.

Stone crafted fingertips lace with a grimace, George's eyes sitting narrowed in his skull. The hood on his head covers dark, slightly curled hair, and his ears have to try and not strain to hear out of the wall through the fabric. His legs are slightly crossed underneath him, shin jumping slightly and foot tapping against linen bed sheets, and if the look on George's face is of disdain then the expression Sapnap wears is of something far worse.

"Don't talk about my brothers sex life," he grumbles, a pointed glare being throw in Quackity's direction. "I do *not* want to think about that shit."

The slam of another door shadows meagre silence, footsteps getting fainter as they drift away and soft laughs melt into the air imperfectly.

"Does this happen often or something?" George asks quietly. His eyes are half shut, eyelids fluttering closed with silver tipped boredom, and maybe it's gotten to that time of night where his lips are far too loose and his tongue snaps out words that he might regret, but right now all George wants is an answer to his question.

"Define often," Sapnap quips, laughing to no one but himself. He sighs. "I guess it does, but again I don't want to talk about it."

Uncertainty taints George's prying eyes; he wants to know if the girl is pretty, if Dream's seen her before or this is some one time thing, but that'd be too far and even if he's tired, George knows boundaries. And he's certainly not going to burst out of the room with the enquiry on his tongue.

"Are we going to hear them?" Quackity sours, quiet jostling in the air as he finds himself a more comfortable position to sit in.

The glare that Sapnap throws him is audible, red with annoyance and a silent demand to shut up without having to make too much noise. If there's a gasp coming from the other room everyone ignores it, pretending the shushing and strike of a wooden headboard against plaster isn't what they're straining not to hear.

George's inhale is sharp. He listens to the buzz of the speakers, the movie looking fuzzed through tired eyes, and even if George isn't paying attention to that particular display he doesn't want to think about what Dream could be doing in that other room. But there's a dash of bitter assumption still at the front of George's wits.

He wonders how Dream looks right now, if his jaw trembles with peppered kisses and hands shake with the headboard's movements. He wonders if his head dips low, whether Dream is the type to hover over with a gentle grip or he pushes himself down and lets skin bloom wine-red, angry to the touch and circled by the indents of pressed fingernails.

It's lewd, almost impermissible. But George wants to see green eyes shrouded in darkness, canines flashing as they clamp down on clear alabaster. And George is pale, almost ghostly with translucence, a lightly freckled face with small patches of the same dots on his slender thighs, so the bite of sharp teeth on any stretch of skin would surely show up a flawless red.

George's eyes are surely frozen over; he does his best to not let his breathing grow heavy, staring back over at the monitor on Sappnap's desk as time ticks by.

It could last an hour or merely three minutes, George can't quite tell, but somewhere along the way the film has switched and an unfamiliar loud action glares yellow in his direction. The protagonist screams, runs and clutches desperately onto some man's hand and George watches with complete disinterest. Sappnap seems to be enjoying himself though. He's the only one actually invested in what's going on.

Low conversation rumbles in short bursts, Karl nodding off then coming back every other minute. And at some point the slamming of a headboard stops and near silence rings through the room once again, end credits rolling with black on the stretched out screen.

There's the blurring of George's vision, almost as though his eyes are filled and glassy with tears, and it's as though his whole body is limp, mouth parted as he nestles himself deeper into the stolen hoodie. Eyelids flutter shut, vision going an empty black. George ignores any mocking words thrown in his direction as he lets himself fall under, sleep coursing through tired bones with no end in sight, and he stretches his legs out as to not let them cramp during the night.

His head feels heavy, eyes feel strained, and the way that the others speak feels slurred, as though their voices only resonate at the back of his mind. It's slightly uncomfortable, George's body propped up and his head resting to the side, ear pressed to the wall as he slips.

The air swirls with tired strokes, egging George on even further. The hoodie on his back swallows him whole, comfort coming in small, constant waves that George takes gladly.

He tries not to think of emerald eyes but it's no use, and the image of dirty blond hair and tacky, black snakebites is the last thing George sees before the light goes out.

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George is the first one to wake up.

It's not surprising, he didn't get the best sleep possible. His neck feels awkward, legs feel stiff, and sunlight pours amber onto his eyes to make him squint and shrink back into himself.

Grumbling under his breath, George tries to stretch his legs out, pressing the heels of his palm onto

the bed and refusing to let the groan slip from his lips. On the floor Sapnap, Quackity and Karl all stay asleep, with their bodies slumped up against random surfaces and Karl having somehow found his way onto the desk chair during the night.

George doesn't want to disturb them, doesn't want to have to deal with the light conversation so early in the morning, so he spares them half a glance before turning away, a breathy sound all he's capable of letting out. Beside him, his phone has half fallen out of his pocket, and when he goes to check the time the white screen glares at him with more intensity than he could have predicted.

It's barely 7am, the cold morning air drifting in through a slightly ajar window. And George's lips feel dry and his tongue feels like sandpaper with the lack of a lip balm or drink in sight.

He should go get some water.

The first step feels ungainly. The balls of George's feet tingle and his balance is nearly thrown by the small creak that the floor gives as it shakes under the new weight, but he pulls through it, shooting a glance to the others just to see if they've stirred.

They haven't. And George takes the opportunity to wander across the room with light steps, rubbing sleep from the corners of his eyes as he does so. He's sure he looks a mess—hair tousled and falling in front of his eyes, the hoodie he wears almost drowning him in fabric, and his sweats aren't the most fashionable but stealing clothes from Sapnap's closet because he'd forgotten to bring his own will never provide the greatest options.

He turns the doorknob slowly, making sure that he doesn't wake anyone in the process, and when he steps out of the room the silence he's met with is deafening. The hallways seem longer in the morning, streaks of light raining through glass in solemn bands, and although George knows that Sapnap's parents are out of town for a few days the stillness still catches him off guard.

With a small breath, he makes his way back down towards the kitchen. It's easy to manoeuvre, simple to find where he's going, and even if he's tired, George doesn't feel as though he'd be able to get lost in a place like this. Long steps take him to cabinets and then paintings and he doesn't stop until he's at the end, stepping straight into the main room with his head down low.

When George looks up the breath in his lungs is ripped away.

*Fuck.*

It's tan skin, a lean body resting straight on bent elbows, a glass in hand when the slope of a neck twists and water drips down a sharp jawline to settle on perfectly toned skin. And it's Dream, of course it's fucking Dream, so the way that George's mouth dries and breathing quickens should be reprimanded.

But the main thing that draws George's eye is the marks. They're red, freshly placed and pomegranate scented, trailing down from the shell of Dream's ear to dip of his hip bones, dotted prettily on the peek of his v line. It feels wrong to look but George can't tear his gaze away, saccharine bites having left violet onto Dream's side in a way that will stay present for days on end.

Mulberry lines Dream's throat, collarbones covered in the same purple-red, and if George squints then he thinks he's able to see the trace of the cherry lipstick stains on skin. He feels dirty for noticing it all, as though his morals are skewed for noticing each dip on Dream's chest, and by no means does he have abs, but he's certainly in shape, sculpted features completely on display with his lack of shirt.

George could stand and stare all day, ogle over Dream's bare chest and let his jaw go slack at the sight, and he's perfectly content to do so too, having stopped under the door frame with wide, fervent eyes. But he's not given the chance, honey slicing through his thoughts with one sharp hack.

"Hey," Dream says, looking at George through the corner of his eyes. There's a grin on his lips, honed corners angled upwards as though he's caught George in something embarrassing, though even if he did notice the staring, George can't stop himself from continuing it.

This time it's the holes under Dream's lips, the small drop where two rounded piercings should sit. Most likely, Dream just took them out for a little comfort, maybe to give himself a break from cheap metal in his mouth, but somehow George is still drawn to the way the small holes shift when Dream's smile grows larger.

The hand holding the glass lowers. "Georgie?" Dream sing-songs, this time with a raise of his eyebrows.

It seems to snap George out of whatever trance he was in. "Oh," he mutters, face heating up under the stare he's receiving. "Hi."

The grin on Dream's face is nauseating, pink tongue jutting out to swipe over his red, bitten lower lip, and his shoulders sit wide with the way he's leant over, back straight and the traces of muscle under the skin poking out to make him look slightly bigger than he actually is. It's attractive, the strength in his arms put perfectly in view, and it's no surprise that he plays football if he looks like this under his shirt.

"Did you sleep well?" Dream asks, a knowing edge to his stare.

"Yes," George mumbles. He almost doesn't say anything else, standing by the doorway with a knot pulled tight in the pit of his stomach, but when Dream raises his eyebrows and drags him back, he manages to choke something out. "Uh, did you?"

"Yeah," Dream smiles.

The weight of the early morning sits heavy on George's shoulders, causing his eyes to wander more than they normally would, and he might be staring at Dream's neck again, the bite of his throat just underneath his Adam's apple where raspberry blotches have been pressed in and massaged to make them stay, but George doesn't have enough shame to stop.

"They're gone now, don't worry," Dream half-laughs, his head falling forward so that his hair can drop in front of his forehead, spotted blond covering up the crinkles of skin.

And at first the words don't make sense, they skim over George's head, confusion pushing its way forwards as he tries to analyse what's been said. "What?"

"You're staring a little."

Dream points to the marks on his neck, chipped black nail polish rubbing over the skin where it blooms white before returning back to the shaded colour when he lets go of it. It's a reminder not to stare, one that fills George with a slight tang of heated embarrassment.

He glances to the side, barely being able to see through the mess of hair in his eyes that's been pushed down by his hood. "Sorry."

"No it's fine," Dream chuckles, batting his hand in the air. "I'd stare too." He looks at George with

something indescribable, body language silently inviting him to step a little closer, get further into the room. “Do you want a drink or something?”

George nods. “Please.”

Cautiously, he wanders towards the counter, watching Dream slide away and his back turned, shoulder blades jutting out when he lifts his arms and stretches slightly. Somehow, the muscle on his back seems defined too, as though Dream spends his time doing pull ups to make them stand out. And the line down his back pushes in when Dream moves to grab the handle of a cupboard, opening it up to grab something that George can drink from.

“I saw you in class earlier,” Dream says, faint muscle flexing when he does so. “When I was on the field, you looked a little distracted.”

There’s the same trail of red on his hip, mottled colour looking pressed like fingerprints on Dream’s waist, and whoever he was with last night didn’t leave a scathe of skin untouched because every single place that George looks is covered.

Forcing out a laugh, George leans back. His hands are still in his pockets, eyes are still roaming. “Are you on the football team?”

“Nah, didn’t make the cut,” Dream smiles, turning around with a glass in his hands. The faucet gets flicked on, a special filter hooked over the front that turns water into small grains before they fall into the cup in his hand. “But I still play. It doesn’t hurt to stay in shape.”

“Yeah.”

“What are you looking at?” Dream asks. Viridian eyes flicker down to his own stomach, a laugh on the edge of his lips when he turns around and George’s gaze is fixed to the same spot. “The marks?”

“Yes.” It’s whispered, beet red as it drips disgracefully from George’s tongue, but thankfully he’s able to hide the emotion when Dream steps back and pushes the full glass in his direction.

Heat sticks to George’s skin like toffee, embarrassing and sticky to the touch. And despite the cherry tinge, Dream still manages to look at him as though he’s something pristine. The glass is passed into his hands with a grin, George’s fingers wrapping around the neck to take it to his lips, and there’s a drop that falls, water sloshing over the sides as George’s hands shake, but he ignores it, muttering small appreciation.

It feels as though there are eyes on him at all times, like even taking a drink is something of a spectacle. Yet this time, Dream is the one that’s watching, his stare firmly trained to George’s lips. The water feels like ice, freezing the inside of his mouth and sliding crisp down the back of his throat, causing a small gasp to choke from George’s breath when he pulls away.

His bottom lip is wet, shiny and slick with the liquid, and it’s hard to ignore the way that Dream’s own lower lip is pulled through pearly teeth at the sight. Covering his blush, George moves to take another sip, two hands moving to grab at the cup and angle it upwards to drink what’s left, but he’s stopped in his tracks when Dream starts to speak again.

“Do you like girls George?” He asks, a laugh tumbling in the air when George whitens and the glass almost slips from his grip. “Careful,” Dream mumbles, reaching forward to take it for himself.

George’s shock must be visible. The ice in his eyes has melted into something sugary, the

crescents on Dream's jaw staring right back. And he almost thinks he heard it wrong, because surely Dream wasn't asking him that, right?

"What?"

"You heard me?" Dream reaps.

It feels like a test, as though the gods have finally given them a moment alone just to taunt George even more, and he's careful with his answer, making sure he doesn't force open doors that should never be ajar.

"I don't, no."

"I do," Dream slurs, the slope of his neck hiding when he dips his head down to rest on his elbows, leaning over the counter so his face is slightly closer to George's. The eye contact feels straining, like shooting bullet holes through olive irises. George almost wants to break it just to see what'll happen, but he doesn't think himself able to.

"I like the pretty ones," Dream continues, lip tucked between his teeth in what could be mistaken for reminiscence. "Shorter than me, good at screaming." He gives a weak laugh, eyes flicking towards George's hair. "The brunettes mostly."

It makes George giggle, something he has to stifle before it gets any further, and surely this is flirting, surely this is something he shouldn't be doing. But it's no use just thinking that—he needs to pull away too, refuse to let it go any further out of respect for both Sapnap and their friendship, no matter how difficult it seems.

George doesn't do that though.

Sweet strawberry floods blood red veins, George's smile crafted from the same taste. His laugh sounds muted, bubbly at first then fading when he sees how Dream has never looked away. It's a sign but George tries to ignore it, because even if he's disobeying wishes and tearing threads, he still doesn't want to push past the irreversible.

"What about guys?" Dream asks, "Do you like them?"

It starts with a shake of the head. "Yeah." George tries not to make it seem like he's meaning Dream too, but it doesn't work. He picks at the material of the hoodie, the second step being to not make it look like he's too interested, maybe if he shows Dream it's wrong then he won't have to deal with the stress that having a crush on his best friend's brother would give.

But temptation makes George delirious.

"Me too." Dream lures, playing with the glass in his hand.

Then it's the flash of a smile, seduction coming strong in hot pink waves that twirl in George's direction. It's a small thought spiralling and visible on the front of Dream's mind, a question forming that George needs to hear, and when it finally finds its way off of a sharp tongue it renders George more than speechless.

"Are you fucking my brother?"

"What?" George heaves, mouth dropping open with immediate denial falling from his jaw. "No!"

"You're wearing his hoodie," Dream shrugs, acting as though the mere thought doesn't make

George's skin crawl with disgust.

"No," he reiterates, glaring. "We're just friends."

A hum trips from Dream's lips. The tip of his finger rolling around the rim of George's glass, tracing over the marks that his lips left when they were clamped down over it. He's not wearing any rings, no accessories on his body, and George spares another glance to his torso, trying not to stare at where Dream's skin disappears under dark sweats.

"Good," Dream comments. "Does that mean you're single?"

George nods. His face is scrunched up, lips in what could be mistook for a pout, and his eyes are narrowed in something annoyed.

"Cute." A honeyed tone drops to something lower, eyes scanning over everything so George has nowhere to hide. "I almost wish you were wearing my clothes instead."

George can't stop the scoff that he lets out. It's lighter than every other word, airy and fuelled by tangerine disbelief, like fire forming amber swirls or barely scorched clementines under the tip of George's nose. He watches Dream match the laugh, head falling forwards to hide his expression, the hints of a possible blush rising on the heights of his cheeks.

It's a subtle feeling, and if Dream wasn't covered in the reds of someone else's fingerprints then George might be able to trick himself into thinking he's the only one who's seen this act. But even if he knows that these looks aren't reserved just for him, it doesn't stop George from feeling special.

The glass is almost empty, shallow drops still sitting at the bottom, but Dream's finger still scrapes around the rim, relentless.

Dream's head pulls back, and even when he's leaning over like this, not standing at his full height and almost looking up to meet George's eyes, he still manages to make him feel small, as though a single touch from Dream would make him keen.

*Dream looks strong.* It runs on repeat in George's mind, tongue pressed up against the backs of ivory teeth, flicking over the roof of his mouth as he stares, and it doesn't help that Dream's looking at him too, a darkened shade to his irises that makes it seem almost as though he wants nothing more than to take George right there and then.

It's filthy, brimmed with something insatiable. And without breaking their eye contact, Dream wraps his hand fully around the cup, lifting it up and off of the counter with a firm grip.

He's not cautious of where George touched, pressing the glass to his lips and letting water flow, and it feels like some unspoken message but George tries not to read too far into it. Seconds feel like eons, time warping around George so differently than how he's used to as Dream drinks from the glass that George had used before. A breathy sound tumbles from George's mouth, thinly veiled attraction present in a fuchsia flush.

Pink lips look so soft, sherbet kisses and sickly sweet strawberry at the front of George's mind. He wonders how those lips would feel against his, if Dream's snake bites will make a difference in how he kisses, the way he slips his tongue into George's mouth or snaps his bottom lip back.

Dream's eyes are angled down too, almost as though the thoughts in his head replicate George's with a similar ferocity. It doesn't help that he's shirtless, almost everything on display and looking so delectable, and George would give anything to be able to reach out and trail marble fingers over



the definition on his chest.

Deafening silence makes George's unspoken commentary even louder, and the glass moves from in front of Dream's face, lips parting as though he's about to say something else but it never comes out, the footsteps padding down the hallway saving them both from something egregious.

"Hey," Sapnap greets, strolling into the room with sleep in his eyes.

He looks tired, almost irritable, and George has to prepare himself for the early morning remarks that'll nip and bite at anything they can.

Shooting a puzzled look in George's direction, Sapnap raises his eyebrows. "What were you guys talking about?"

"Nothing," George says quickly—almost too quickly. It earns a laugh from Dream, breathless and pent up, and he half wants to give him a light shove just so he knows to knock it off when Sapnap is around.

It's a harsh reminder that this is Sapnap's brother, not some potential boyfriend or even a quick lay. This is someone unattainable, someone who he can never have, and the thought makes George's posture stiffen, blades digging into the base of his spine to keep him up.

"Gross," Sapnap spits in Dream's direction, trying to not stare the marks on his chest in the eye, mulberry bites shining on tan skin.

He gets a roll of the eyes in response, Dream's snowy response brash and almost brutish. Head lolling to the side, Dream glances at George as if to say that Sapnap's being irrational, but when George scans over the purple on the bite of his throat he can almost understand where he's coming from. Because he might not mean a thing to Dream, messing with his brother's best friend could just be another conquest, a game of sorts, and that danger makes tension twist and tug at his stomach.

One second and then two, and before George can stop himself he's staring again, trying to keep the gaze hidden behind brown-black hair. His sleeves droop over his hands, red tipped fingers barely poking out when George finally pushes the hood back, shaking his head with a scrunched up expression to let heat pour off his body.

Chrome green follows each movement. The sense of being watched never fades, holes cut behind paintings and one way glass in a strong film in front of him. George half wants to keep it forever.

"What time do you have to be home Georgie?" Dream asks, the same sherbet tongue dripping candied words as though his brother isn't standing next to them and getting ready to make something to eat

George inhales. "Before 10." It sounds hushed, like fingers dancing against cold skin, whispered confessions behind locked doors and under thin sheets, and George wants to delve into the thought, drag Dream down with him and paint him in oils or acrylics or something even softer. And with the way Dream looks at him it feels as though they have something to hide—dark and subdued with lips pressed together in a flat line, only the edges curled up.

"Do you need a ride?" He asks.

"No thanks."

Sapnap's presence is thundering. All he does is turn around, make sure to face George when he

speaks, but it still makes George feel as though he's done something wrong.

"What? You always complain about having to walk home?" Sapnap accuses, scepticism on loose features.

It's a fight to keep the glare off of his face, a tight, unappreciative smile drawn on in a thin swoop that cracks with each second. If time moved slowly before then now it ticks by with rapid speed, flooding George's mind with panic and fear and everything red.

Dream's grin is knowing, dirty and flashing with crystal, and George wants to lean forward and slap it off of his face, maybe wipe the minor embarrassment off of his own while he's at it too.

"It's fine," George grits out, "I could use the fresh air."

He's met with a shrug. "Okay." Sapnap moves to grab a cup before leaving, silently dragging George along with him. "We should wake the others up," he explains, with George paying no mind to how Dream stretches out and moves to stand tall above him, the few inches of extra height making it seem like he towers completely over them both. "With the way Karl slept his neck is going to kill."

Dragging his feet across the floor, George takes hesitant steps towards him, back turned to face where Dream stands shirtless and ridiculously hot. His focus may shift a few times but he tries to ignore it, saccharine kisses flickering in his vision. And he's thankful that he has to leave soon because in all honesty, spending another minute with Dream might just be the thing that makes him snap.

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The first thing that George does when he gets home is shut off his phone.

He makes a mad dash to his bedroom, ignoring the worried calls that are thrown in his direction from his parents and kicking off his shoes at the door. Disarray means he almost trips up on the way, backpack being thrown to the side before he rushes up the stairs as quickly as physically possible. His bedroom door is slammed shut. And it's sweltering shame that's radiating from shaking fingertips as George throws himself onto his bed, still wearing Sapnap's stupid hoodie.

Mortification hits him first.

It's staggering, almost overwhelming, and George's skin feels red and his breathing feels heavy, but for some reason he can't keep the smile off of his face. It makes him stupid, makes his elbows come up to cover his eyes as he tries not to laugh, and George has never really been flirted with, or if he has he's never paid enough attention to the fleeting touches people will leave or the shy way they'll twiddle their hair in the hopes of getting him into bed, but right now he'd be stupid not to realise that's what was happening.

It's still Sapnap's brother though.

George knows that it's wrong, and he knows that any blue loyalty that runs through his veins should stop him from even thinking about Dream's skin on his, but the rush he gets when Dream talks to him makes him feel dizzy.

It'd be foolish to think it's not a crush, George knows that. But what he also knows is that Dream

might like him too. They were *both* flirting, it doesn't take George long to figure it out. Hushed smiles playing on repeat in his head, film rolling and snagging every other minute so he has to rewind the flickering picture to see it even clearer.

Hours can pass and George will still be on the same fixation, a dopey smile pulled across his face the entire time. And he's lying on his back, having long since changed out of borrowed clothes to be back in his own, a pair of shorts that let long, slender legs sit sprawled out across silk sheets and a shirt that lies far too big on him, allowing prominent collarbones to poke out and drift across cool, stale air.

If he ghosts a hand up his side he can almost imagine it's Dream's.

There's a part of him that wonders if it's stupid to feel like this—to like a boy that might not actually like him back. Because flirting might mean nothing to Dream, even if it means everything to George. Then there's the reminder that this is his best friend's brother, someone who might just be teasing him for the hell of it.

There's a reputation that goes with a name of course.

Straight after their first meeting, George had made sure to keep his ears open the next day at school, and if Sapnap's stories hadn't painted the best images of Dream then the stories he'd heard surely hadn't either.

The first thing was just something he'd overheard in the hall, a girl leaning against a locker with a coy smirk on her lips, whispering something far too loud to someone who's more invested than they should be.

"He did," she'd insisted, "I saw the bruises. They totally did it behind the bleachers."

It hadn't piqued George's interest at the time, blurred faces barely even registering in his mind, and he'd shuffled past her to get to his own locker, trying to collect the books that he'd needed for his next class. His hand had only just managed to reach the lock, the grooves of his fingers tracing over the little number pad and fidgeting with the black etches, when he'd heard the name.

"Yes, Dream!" The girl had emphasized, "They've been hooking up, I'm telling you."

"For how long?" Another voice had asked, boredom in the tone.

"Like a week." George's head had tilted, almost as though he was trying to get a little closer. "You know how Dream gets anyway, she'll be old news by tomorrow."

It's a laugh then the slamming of a locker, footsteps trailing away and leaving George to stand by himself, too far in his own thoughts to even think of moving.

At the time he hadn't really paid much attention, it's just a rumour, why would he? For all he knows it could've just been some stupid high school gossip, one lie embellished until it's blown so far out of proportion that it's impossible to come back from. And sure, throughout the day rumours of the same kind flew past his open ears with more viscosity than imaginable, but George has never listened to rumours, normally they're more wrong than right.

But there's a small part of him that thinks, now that he's here sitting on his own bed, having seen the way Dream had looked at him with the red from someone else's lips on his neck that definitely won't be coming off for days, maybe this isn't right.

He feels selfish nonetheless.

It toys with his head. George's hand comes up to rest on his stomach, splaying over the pale, unmarked skin and before he can really think about what he's doing, he's taking a small amount of the peach between two fingers, pinching hard enough to feel the sting before regrettably letting go.

A small corner in his mind might think that it feels good, eyes fluttering shut as he imagines it's Dream's teeth instead, scraping pink onto his torso then trailing it up to his chest, leaving raw, attacked skin under the ghost of black metal.

George's hands are shaking when he stops completely, placing both of his palms on the bed sheets beside him instead. The mess of hair on his head has fallen back, not in his eyes and letting the dip of his hairline sit on display in front of nothing, but George can't think about what he looks like when he's got Dream on his mind in lieu.

No matter how many people Dream has slept with, whether he's been in love with them or not, there's no way he could fake the looks he was giving to George. They were dangerous, alluring, and George can only let himself fall into them when he closes his eyes, thinking of a hopeless not-crush and begging for it to be requited.

Even though he shouldn't, he wants to see Dream again. See stupid piercings and share dark looks that can never be acted upon. It's almost as though he enjoys being teased and taunted like this, and maybe George is letting himself think of being wrapped up with Dream and his tan skin but right now all it is is physical attraction, Dream is hot and George has seen him shirtless, there's no way he can't fantasize about that. Yet any type of romance is still out of the picture.

George might like the temptation but he isn't going to let himself catch any sort of feelings. So he turns his head to the side, blows a fallen strand of hair out from in front of his face and ponders just cutting contact off with Sapnap all together to stop any possible heartache.

Cut off contact—that's it.

If he doesn't talk to Dream he won't get wrapped up in that world. And he certainly won't become a rumour or anything for people to gawk at when he walks down the hallways, because the only thing worse than losing his best friend would be becoming the centre of unwanted attention.

Still, there's no chance that George is going to let that happen.

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Realistically, George knows that Sapnap isn't home. He knows that.

He knows that right now Sapnap should be at violin practice, plucking feeble strings with the end of a horsehair bow, his head angled down and passion running pink from his fingertips. There's idle sport to it, George has never considered himself a musician or someone that's able to pour hours into something that'll leave him with dear skill, but the symphonies that Sapnap will play when George sits on his bed, uncaring, are enough to make him at least appreciate the talent.

And it's been that way ever since they met, allotted time spots always having been meant for time apart, where Sapnap can work on his own things and George can do the same. They've been friends long enough to know each other's schedules.

So truthfully, George knows that Sapnap isn't going to answer the phone. His mobile will be off too, shoved in his bag and disregarded towards the back of a filled hall, but it doesn't stop George

from ringing.

His phone is pressed close to his ear, hot surface burning skin as the ring rattles out in a thin drone. And to be frank, George doesn't even know why he's calling, he knows their plans, what time they should be meeting and where they're meant to see each other, but sometimes he likes the confirmation.

Slender fingers clutch onto the black corners of his phone, George with his back pressed up against his kitchen counter and his lips pressed together. There's uneasiness in the twist of his stomach, a certain apprehension that he feels when the phone dips straight to voicemail and his thumb hovers over the 'end call' button.

It's a move so fundamentally wrong when George takes a moment to think of the possibilities. He'd slept on it, let his thoughts be overcome with stupid infatuation, and an almost-crush shouldn't be what makes George stare at the black screen of his phone, closing his eyes to try and shake the thought that's running through his mind.

If there's no reason for him to call Sapnap's mobile then there's no real reason for him to be calling Sapnap's home number either.

It's nervous hands that punch the second number into the phone, clicking on the icon that pops up and the breath that George lets out when he hears the first echo is pained.

The dread sets in a second too late. Even if Sapnap doesn't pick up, there's no telling who will and George certainly doesn't want to spend his time on call with someone else's parents, but he does it anyway. Maybe because the possibility of hearing someone he shouldn't want to speak to is far too tempting.

It's barely five seconds but in that time George can feel his heart drop, stuttering and bleeding red when he holds his breath and keeps his ears open. For a moment he wonders if no one will answer, because 9am on any morning might be too early for some people to be able to think, but that thought dissipates at the click of sound through a grating speaker.

"Hey."

George stills. Despite the chances he'd never actually imagined that Dream would pick up. Guilt wracks through his body in milliseconds, making his knees feel weaker than they should and his whole body is only up because of the support he has on the frame behind him.

It's almost as though he planned it out, calling even though he knows Sapnap isn't home, and he wants to feel bad because it's his own stupid fantasies about black snakebites and angled features that brought him here, but in all honesty he can't. Because it might not be what Sapnap wants but George indulging himself in something he can't have for just a moment can't hurt either of them, at least that's what he hopes.

"Hello?"

George's hands tense.

"Hey," he says, keeping any strain out of his voice. And if Dream can hear his disorientation then he doesn't comment on it. "Is Sapnap there?"

There's a pause. "Oh, George, right?" Dream asks. He sounds close, almost as though he's leaning into the phone, letting the microphone ghost just over his lips and leaning his head to the side. "I think I recognise your voice."

“That’s me,” George says, letting something injudicious linger on curled lips. The smile is shy but recognisable, and he almost feels like he’s holding a secret on the backs of white teeth, not allowing real intent to drip from his tongue.

He can hear breathing through the phone, something heavy and weighted when it lands on George’s ears, and there’s a small flicker of self-consciousness that runs through blue veins when George realises that maybe this was an awful idea after all. Dull moments lasting forever when they fall.

“He’s not here, but I can pass on a message.” Dream’s amusement is visible through his tone, strawberry sweetness sounding razor-edged. It squeezes at George’s chest, makes him push back against the counter slightly and reach a hand down to grip at the bend. “If that’s cool with you?”

“I just wanted to know if me and him were still on for later,” George half-lies.

Intrigue makes itself known in a silken hum, voice warping with glacéed cherries as it writhes and turns to send a shudder down George’s spine. “What are you guys doing?”

“Shopping.”

“He didn’t ask to borrow the car,” Dream notes, “How are you guys getting there?”

George’s bottom lip feels torn with nerves. “By bus probably.” He chews down on pretty pink, trying not to draw blood as he waits for Dream’s words. Even with tension in the strands of each bone, things don’t feel too strained, like the rattling in George’s stomach that dips and runs with each second is only there because he indulges in it.

There’s a small thrill that comes with the tension, fear coming in strong waves that fail to catch George off-guard. And he wonders if Dream feels it too, whether his hands feel sweaty or he’s running fingers through his hair before gripping it and pulling it out of his eyes.

George can imagine the metal rings up against dirty blond, thick fingers that are surely bigger than his own flexing and tensing with each passing second, and he’s glad that Dream can’t see him, because even after a few days to reflect on every sinful thought that passes through his mind, George still hasn’t been able to force himself to get over it.

“No,” Dream says suddenly, candied tone taking George by the wrists and dragging him back to reality. “No way, I’ll drive you.”

“Oh, no it’s fine,” George rushes out.

“It’s no problem, really,” Dream says, “I have someone I have to meet in a few hours anyway.”

For a moment, George’s heart trips, blood red arteries twisting as he tips his head to one side. Dream’s tone is conversational, almost as though he can’t understand the slight pang of something that definitely-isn’t-jealousy that hits George all at once.

“Who?” He asks, his lips slipping before they can stop them. Undeserved possessiveness is kept out of his voice with little trouble, and George can pretend it’s not noticeable but that’s for Dream to decide, definitely not him.

“A uh— a friend.” Dream’s stutter doesn’t go under the radar, George picking up on it and feeling his hopes sink even more than they should. It’s a lie, George isn’t stupid, he can tell, and he feels his smile slip for half a second as he processes it.

It's more of a reaction than he should have, and George inwardly scolds himself for it, because he shouldn't care what Dream does. A physical attraction doesn't give him any right to feel hurt, so he doesn't. He takes a small breath, forcing a grin onto his lips as he pretends to be interested in the person that Dream is seeing, because it could be the same person in all of the rumours, or someone completely different. But either way it tells George all he needs to know about whether the flirting was real or not. And he can't be disappointed so instead he just pretends to care.

"Really?"

Dream laughs, low and gravelly. "It's nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about."

"Right," George mumbles. *Pretty*. Why is Dream calling him pretty if he has a date later? It's one of the few things that George can't wrap his head around, purple confusion leaving his lips in the shallow breaths that he takes as he keeps his phone pressed tight against his ear. "Just tell Sapnap I called, okay?"

It's soft, even to his own ears, and it'd be a wonder if Dream can even hear him. Moving to end the call, George lets his eyebrows push together into a furrowed position. His thumb taps on the screen, heat running through his mind as he tries to imagine how Dream looked when he'd uttered the goading words. And he's so close to ending the call before he's stopped by Dream's honeyed voice.

"Wait," he says, sounding slightly out of his element. "Before you go."

There's a pause, enough time for the gears in George's head to turn, to come up with an evidential reason for Dream not wanting him to leave. It could be him shutting everything down right now, him telling George that the flirting is just a joke, something to annoy Sapnap or make George blush, and that Dream will never actually like him the way that he's not allowed to. George almost wishes it was that, it'd give him a reason to stop clinging onto white, blinding hope.

"You should have my number, just in case Sapnap doesn't pick up."

George hesitates. "What?"

The splutter on the other end of the phone is muffled, almost embarrassed sounding. George can't quite understand it, because why would he need Dream's number? It feels like some sick attempt to get in his head, make him assume that Dream may actually want to talk to him, he's seen it in movies, heard the awful pick-up lines that normally lead up to moments like these, and frankly George won't fall for it.

"You might need it one day," Dream rambles. "You know, in case you and Sap are stranded somewhere, or you're at a party and need help, honestly it's stupid that you don't have my number, you should have had it for ages."

"Okay," George mutters, apprehensive.

Without wanting to, eager hands move to grab a notepad and pen, fitting snug into George's left hand as he attempts to write down the numbers that Dream rattles out, pink sherbet lining the edges of written words, and if George puts a small heart on the end that he crosses out before he can even look at it that's only for him to know.

He lets the pen slip through stone sculpted fingers, hitting the counter with a small tap that fizzles out as it rolls away. George drags his nails over the digits just to see if they'll bite back.

"Remember to save the number, okay?" Dream's words sound held back, like he's tiptoeing over

something that George hadn't wanted to touch. "I'll see you later Georgie."

"Bye Dream."

Silence follows the click of the phone call, George sitting with the phone in his hand and absolutely no-one on the other end, and when honey dissipates and leaves nothing in its trail, George doesn't quite know how to feel.

He knows that Dream doesn't like him, he knows that to him he's just his brother's friend, but for some reason it feels like Dream doesn't know that as well as George does. Sighing, George sets his phone down, Sapnap finally forcing his way back into his thoughts and the shame finally burns itself onto his cheeks.

He called for Dream and not Sapnap, and there's no way that Sapnap won't know that when the story is relayed to him. It's fear that lines the tremble of George's hands. If he manages to survive that conversation then there's no chance he'll try and pursue Dream after it, and he definitely won't be calling him.

At least that's what George hopes.

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The car pulls up at around 3.

If George puts more effort into his outfit than he normally does then he doesn't want a comment on it, and his head lies tired on his arms, marble skin cold to the touch as amber eyes stare out of the window. It's slow, George watches the wheels scrape over the road, pondering how they found their way here with crystals shining in his eyes. And he wonders if he stares hard enough, if the glass will shatter right in front of him.

Sapnap's in the back seat, rolling the window down so he can make himself known. There's a flavoured fruit, effervescent powder on the tip of George's tongue, and he tugs on the hem of his sweater, beige material wrapped loose around his neck.

A ding on his phone makes George's head lift. The crease on his forehead striking an angry line across translucence, possible tension or disquiet so completely obvious on innocent features.

Ador carries George towards the doorway, lets him float towards the car with Sapnap grinning at him in a noiseless invitation. At first George keeps his eyes off of Dream, forcing himself to only look at his friend as though his brother isn't one that invited them here over a phone call that never should have happened.

Confusion is evident in all of George's movements, and if he knew where he and Dream stood the wave he throws in Sapnap's direction wouldn't look nearly as forced.

"You look cute in that sweater," Sapnap chides, pushing open the car door to let George slide in next him.

"Shut up," George jokes. He doesn't spare a single glance towards the front. "Where are we going first?"

"I want to check out the new game store."



Groaning, George tips his head back, lets his neck flash with paleness and his jugular show angled lines. In the mirror there's a poorly concealed stare, George trying not to look in favour of giving undivided attention straight to Sapnap, who only looks mildly confused.

George makes bad decisions sometimes, he just wishes that Dream wouldn't play into them.

"Hey Georgie."

He debates not answering, putting on his seatbelt. "Hi Dream."

It's cold, frozen and snowy and George passes it off with a shrug, leaning into Sapnap to stare at his phone invasively. There are no more questions or greetings thrown in his direction, and George doesn't know if he wishes there were.

His clothes feel slightly stuffy; warm and making his skin pink and kaleidoscopic. But at least he doesn't have to stop desire from showing in his words. The car starts up again, drifting down grey roads, and any flaring studies are reflected with little interest.

They drive in silence.

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George and Sapnap have always been an odd pair.

They're not bad together, just *eccentric*, and while that makes for interesting conversations, sometimes bad decisions are just as often.

They don't hang out nearly as much as they should, most of their conversations are held over late night phone calls, Minecraft servers and scuffed games of CS:GO being the main bridge between them. So that means that the time they do spend together—the meetings in person—George appreciates more than anything.

Because in all honesty, George's social life would be in ruins if it weren't for his best friend.

Sapnap's new games are in a grey bag, held in a knuckle tight grip that's almost bruising. And they're holding drinks, shoving each other to the side in imperfect harmony. Brash chatter keeps them walking, and it's crude comments from Sapnap that make George choke and wonder how he'd ever thought about betraying him.

Their local mall is large, a hotspot for some of the people in their school, but they rarely go there themselves, preferring to just sit at home and make their own fun. So the new shops that have popped up and been dashed around the area are more than surprising to the two of them.

"Dude," Sapnap groans, laughing lightly. "Look over there."

His hand points up, angling George's gaze towards one of the darker stores towards the side, shrouded by red lighting and blackened windows. And it's a sex shop, George can definitely tell, but what he can't understand is why Sapnap is pointing it out to him.

"Don't point," he scolds, elbowing him in the side to lower his finger and not draw attention to them both.

Sapnap doesn't let up though. With determination in his steps, he follows the path over, dragging

George along behind him with an invisible rope. The whole time, George keeps his head down, hoping no one else can see where they're going, especially not someone they know.

Abruptly, Sapnap comes to a stop.

He's peering into the open doors, eyes wide and glee on his face as he looks around and tries to see everything in there, and George looks in too, pretending he isn't just as interested. It's slightly embarrassing, two guys just stopped and staring into a sex shop, and George doesn't quite know why they're doing it, honestly, he doesn't even think Sapnap would be allowed in.

There's a hand placed on his shoulder, completely unexpected. George flinches under the touch. The same hand points back into the shop, singling out something in a chic black box on a flat counter. It's obvious as to what it is, and George doesn't think he likes where this is going.

The next words that leave Sapnap's lips are terrifying. "I dare you to go in and buy one."

"What the fuck?" George exclaims, turning to him with white shock. "No."

"You can't say no," Sapnap groans. "It's a dare."

"It's embarrassing."

"It's sex," Sapnap explains as though it excuses it all. "It's perfectly healthy for guys our age."

"Normal people don't dare their friends to go out and buy *dildos*."

A laugh bubbles in the air. "What do you know about normal?"

They're back to their staring match, eyes burning into each other as they glower, and any attempt not to draw attention to themselves seems to have been thrown straight out of the window because they certainly aren't being discreet.

"If I do it you owe me 50 dollars," George barter, crossing his arms as he seethes.

"No way."

"Then I'm not doing it."

"Fine," Sapnap drones, exasperated. "45 dollars."

"Fifty."

A playful glare makes its way onto Sapnap's face. His head shakes when he goes to grab his wallet from his back pocket. "Fuck you."

It's fifty dollars in his hand that gets pushed into George's, and just because he's feeling bold, George takes it upon himself to stick mischievous hands forward and rifle through Sapnap's wallet to take another five. It earns him a scowl, no real malice or crimson behind it, but it's a scowl nonetheless. And he's pushed forward before he can put the money away, almost knocking into someone their age as he's forced in line.

The doors are open, almost pleading for his presence, and the grimace on George's lips and the flush on his neck should tell any worker all of the qualms he feels when he walks in.

It's not the first time he's been the victim of one of Sapnap's bets. They make the same stupid choices every week, with it ending badly more times than not, but it's idiotic pride that means they

always end up following through.

Sapnap's staring is obvious and he's likely laughing to himself and riding the high of George's discomposure. Understandably, George wants to get in and out of there as quickly as possible, get what he's been dared to and then just leave. Because why the fuck does he need a dildo of all things? What would he even do with it?

*Actually no, George does not need to think about that.*

There's a selection of things on the first few counters, and George doesn't quite know what to do with himself. He's never been quite opposed to sex—he's a typical 18 year old guy—he's definitely touched himself before. Except this seems more exhibitionistic than anything else, customarily because he doesn't actually intend on using anything he buys.

His fingers trace across the counter as though it's on fire, like velvet composed threads run through his fingertips to create an imperfect mottle. Adrenaline makes him grab the box as quickly as he can, appearing shoddy as he holds it close to his chest and tries not to let humiliation sink in. It's slightly heavy and George doesn't bother to read the label, but it's a fucking dildo, there's no way for him not to look weird when he holds it.

Before he can talk himself out of it, George hurries over to the counter, placing the box down in front of a worker that stands with more disinterest than George had anticipated.

"I.D?" The worker questions giving a quick nod when George pulls it out of his pocket just to prove his age. They scan the box before placing it back down in front of George's awkward stature.

He's burning up, trying not to make direct eye contact even though the worker appears to really not be able to care less.

"Do you want a bag?"

"No thanks," George breathes, voice coming out more choked than he had wanted, and he tries not to grimace at the sound.

"That'll be nineteen ninety-nine."

It's a quick exchange, nothing really to be embarrassed about, but George can already feel the heat boiling scarlet under his skin when he reaches forward to pass Sapnap's money into their hand.

He doesn't bother to ask for a bag, grabbing the receipt and dashing out of there as soon as he can, and he pushes the thing straight into Sapnap's open arms, disregarding the rattling laugh that's echoing through whistling air as he does so.

Oil paints leave an off putting scent in the air as they paint George's cheeks with garnet, Sapnap's features not having the dignity to adhere to the same standards. Once the laughing has ceased, Sapnap's eyes trail over the white words, reading exactly what George has bought. And after a second, the laughter almost tumbles out again.

"You bought a vibrator," he snickers, trying not to laugh too outlandishly. "Did you even get batteries for it?"

"No." A scowl. "It's not as though I'm actually going to use it."

"Right."

George gets a clap on the back, a possible congratulations for completing the task in front of him. The toy gets pushed into the same place as the games, hidden behind plastic in his friend's grip.

To George's surprise, no-one really seems to be watching them, everyone going about with their days as though they have better things to do. And self-righteousness makes it nearly seem insulting. A hand on the small of George's back helps him to carry on walking, and while he does it with an eye roll, a giggle almost managing to escape his lips, he doesn't quite mind the help.

"I've got to be home soon," Sapnap sighs, a quick roll of his eyes making George groan.

"Really?" George drones, "You make me buy a dildo and then you try and just leave, how is that fair?"

"Tough luck *Gogy*."

George's scowl makes Sapnap's face crack again, laughter bubbling back up in orange hues and loud vibrant yellows, and it's a pretty sound, maybe bashing and brutish but still pretty, enough to make George laugh too.

There's the glare of Sapnap's phone, messages flickering on a screen that's slightly blurred just out of George's sight, and nosiness makes him try and lean over to catch up on what's being missed. Without saying a word, Sapnap pushes him back, almost shoving George over while he's at it, and while normally George would be able to find it in him to complain, right now he can't, because he's having far too much fun to ruin it with a few biting words.

Sapnap's holding the bag for both of them, not bothering to make George carry something with his own embarrassing item in it instead, and when George remembers exactly what's in that box his mind drifts to somewhere it shouldn't—more specifically slightly defined muscle and sharpened canines, pretty blond hair and a name so obnoxious it should be stupid.

*No.*

George's eyes dart back up to his friend.

Even if Sapnap is a bit much at times, George wouldn't trade him for the world.

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It's when he's almost home that George starts to think the universe really does hate him.

Dream picked them up, slid into an open parking spot and stood outside with a brand new obnoxious mark on the side of his neck, almost as though he's flaunting battle scars or something impressive and George gave him half a smile before looking away.

Throughout the whole drive, George can feel himself being watched, almost as though someone's trying to grab his attention even though they shouldn't.

He's too tired to make conversation and Sapnap knows that so he leaves him alone, only talking to him when they finally pull up alongside George's house.

"Here," Sapnap offers, "I'll take my stuff, you take the bag." He winks, keeping a blood secret between the two of them that George takes with blue thankfulness. And he makes sure that the box

with the vibrator is kept straight out of sight when he moves to open up the door to leave.

It's a passing remark really, something that George shouldn't really pay attention to.

Mindless teasing.

The bag is in his hands when he gets out of the car, ready to go back into his own house, and he's perfectly content with carrying his own things himself, but Dream—being the *gentleman* that he is—steps out of the car with him, taking the bag out of his hands before he can even protest.

It's pathetic how quickly George swoons, all previous thoughts running from his mind when he watches Dream take his things with ease and guide him towards his house, and all George hopes is that Sapnap isn't looking when he nearly faints with the charm.

Then he remembers what's in the bag, doing his best to stop Dream from taking it any further.

He stops George from protesting, saying "I've got it, don't worry." And clearly he doesn't understand George's panic because he walks with him as though nothing's wrong at all.

"No it's fine," George opposes. He moves to grab at the bag, seeing Dream's scornful look, and it's a painful reminder of how stupidly pretty he looks in the fluorescent lighting, olive eyes and a perfectly turned nose angled straight towards George's sinless picture.

"I insist," Dream rebuts, keeping the bag on his right, just out of George's grasp.

It doesn't stop him from trying though, leaning forwards to try and take it straight from Dream's hands. Their proximity shallows, George unintentionally pushing further into Dream's space to try and grab the handle back from him, and surprisingly, Dream doesn't step back.

"It's like you have something to hide," Dream laughs.

The worry that spikes through George's veins when he goes to peer into the shopping bag is overwhelming.

It feels as though everything is moving in slow motion, George reaching forwards to try and stop him but it's too late. Virescent eyes widen in what could be seen as awe, George pulling an ugly face as Dream stops and looks down, and they're standing right outside of his house, so close to the door that if George really wanted to he could just grab his things and run inside.

"Wow," Dream smirks, keeping his stare pointed down. "Honestly, I never pegged you for the type."

"It was a dare," George offers, tirelessly.

"You don't need to excuse it princess." Dream's look is smug, "Buying sex toys is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact it's kind of..." His gaze turns to George's waist, trailing down to his legs before dipping back up. "...attractive."

Any response that George could come up with would be weak, so he lets the pink-hued flush take over and allows his posture to be changed to something less open. Turned slightly towards Dream with his hands strewn together.

"Besides," Dream continues, "I have something like this too." It's a curled smile, fangs poking out to intensify the look.

“Really?”

“Yeah,” his eyes run down George’s body, clothing turning invisible under the glare, and George half wonders if he should try and cover himself to stop Dream from seeing everything. “It’s for guests like you,”

The blush on George’s face catches him off guard, and it’s a mix of red embarrassment and something pink. Something that George can’t wipe away as quickly as he would like. Dream’s lip is shiny, drawn dipping down where the black piercing juts out and sits in two rounded circles that a sharpened tooth catches on, and it’s almost a smirk that he wears, enrapture in honed canines.

“Here,” Dream says, pushing the bag back into George’s hands, tantalizing. “If you need batteries for it you can always ask me. I’d be uh– happy to help.”

He doesn’t let go of the bag straight away, letting their fingers touch for half a second, black nail polish scraping against pure alabaster, making George’s eyes widen, and this has to be flirting, because comments like those are going to be death of him and Dream might not even know he’s the cause.

After a moment, George recoils from the touch, stepping back far too quickly and almost stumbling from the suddenness. Viridian eyes are still on him, watching him turn and mutter his thanks as he searches for his keys in one of his pockets.

He fumbles with the lock, almost missing and cursing himself in embarrassment, and he hopes that Sapnap isn’t watching him from the car, scrutiny in narrowed eyes. Finally, he pushes through, nodding quickly at Dream and sliding through through the open gap, lust in his expression as Dream stares straight back.

The door slams, George’s back pressed up against it. His head falls back, breathing coming out heavier than it should, and the way his lips morph into a smile is more than wrong. A laugh sounds breathless, a bag falls down to the ground and George follows. It’s a yellow symphony that plays in his head, happiness and shame the only thing that George can register, and all he can think of is how warm Dream’s skin had felt on his.

## Chapter End Notes

as always comments and kudos really make my day !!

also, I wanted to link this [art](#) of dream inspired by this fic, because it's genuinely amazing and if you haven't, maybe drop a follow for the artist :DD

and [my twitter](#)

## Chapter 3

### Chapter Summary

“So did I then,” Dream nods. “Can I sit with you?”

“You already are.”

The raise of an eyebrow is fuelled by fake annoyance, amber lines forging small creases. “Well can I stay?”

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

From the first step that George takes into the school building, he already knows that it’s not going to be an easy day.

It’s a familiar buzz, each student walking with a pep that George doesn’t seem to possess, and he’s trying to look cheerful, books in his bag and hair dangling in front of his eyes no matter how many times he’s pushed it away. But for some reason, he doesn’t think anyone’s buying it.

To have to try and traverse the halls by himself is annoying but George is prepared for it— he has to be, because somehow Sapnap has come down with a mysterious “illness” that George isn’t too sure he believes in. Either way he’s here alone for the day, maybe even the week, and that means no company during lunch and no one to save him a seat on the bus or even walk him home.

George scowls to himself. His shoes are slightly scuffed, scraping across the ground as he walks just because he can’t be bothered to pick them up properly. And today it feels as though someone’s watching him, as though he’s never truly alone with his thoughts.

Sapnap should’ve just sucked it up and gotten dressed, George is sure he’d be able to have made it. And he’s only slightly irritated by the fact that there’s a group of people all standing in front of his locker, completely blocking the way even though this far into the school year they should know that that’s definitely *George’s* locker.

He grumbles under his breath, foot tapping lightly against the floor as he decides what to do, and before George can find it in himself to grow a spine and tell those guilty to move out of his way, he feels a sudden hand clamp down on his shoulder.

“What the— *Dream?*”

The man in question smiles, a wolfish grin on his face as he studies the way that George is standing—clearly surprised and slightly unsure.

“Hey Georgie,” Dream greets. He’s far too composed for the situation, towering over George and angling his head down so they seem even closer, trapped inside of a narrow and packed hallway but still managing to make it feel as though it’s just the two of them there.

George stares for a second. He lets his eyes widen and lips part so the shock is probably visible on his face, and he knew that he should have washed his hair yesterday because right now he’s sure

that Dream must be judging him for the mess.

“Sapnap wanted me to give you this.”

A book is pushed into his hands, George frowning for a slight second as he reads the cover.

“Thanks?” He starts. “But I don’t need this today, Sapnap should know that.”

“He did mention it,” Dream grins, his piercings shifting when the smile turns into something coy. “But I figured making sure you’re not missing anything wouldn’t hurt. Plus I get to see your pretty face.”

It’s a red blush, annoyance muffled with slight diffidence, and George doesn’t know if Dream is just teasing him or the slight blush on his cheeks is real. There’s something scary in the way Dream stands, like he’s not holding anything back or trying to make George feel any different to anyone else, and for some reason George appreciates that, even though his best friend’s brother shouldn’t be the one that gives him the validation.

“Well thank you,” he shrugs, lifting the book up and dangling it in mid-air.

Neither makes the effort to move, George standing idle while being jostled about by busy figures, and it barely even hits him that right now this is the only real conversation he’s had with Dream outside of his and Sapnap’s home.

It should make him wary, force George to take a step back and put things into perspective, but it doesn’t, and somehow that’s scarier than anything else.

“Why are you still here?” George asks, words harsher than they need to be as they cut blue lines straight to the point just to ensure that Dream gets it, and thankfully Dream doesn’t seem to take much real offense.

A hand clamps over Dream’s chest, a small chuckle escaping his lips. “Ouch,” he exclaims, flicking his head to one side to push any blond strands of hair away. “That hurt.”

“Shut up,” George scoffs, and he laughs, *actually laughs*, shaking his head and trying to hide his smile with the back of his hand. “I meant, shouldn’t you be going to class or something?”

An eyebrow raise. “I could ask you the same question.”

“I’m waiting to go to my locker,” George explains, gesturing over to the red door.

It feels less awkward than it should be; there’s less strain on the words that leave George’s mouth than he’d anticipated, but no matter what George can never forget that he’s literally seen Dream shirtless and covered in bright, scarlet hickeys—mainly because it’s half of their grade’s biggest fantasy and undoubtedly, it shouldn’t be George’s too.

“Why are you standing here then?” Dream questions. Mild amusement flickers over his features, almost as if he’s asking George if the company is the only thing that’s stopping him from leaving, impossible ego somehow not making George sour.

Thankfully it isn’t though, so George doesn’t have to lie when he says, “I’m waiting for the people to move.”

“Just ask them to,” Dream shrugs, glancing over to the people behind them, and he leans forwards a little, maybe because someone accidentally shoved him or just because he wants to. And George



doesn't step back when Dream gets a little too close and lowers his voice. "Or I can, if you really want?"

There are eyes burning into the back of George's skin, shooting bullets through his neck and body and making him feel completely naked as he stands there in front of them all and Dream. Surely it's an odd sight for people to see, one of the biggest attractions hanging around with the guy that barely even has his name known by half of the population, but even so, their inquiry isn't exactly polite.

"You wouldn't mind?" George asks.

"Of course not." Dream glances up, a friendly offer, that's all. "I'm always for helping pretty boys like you out of tough spots."

George pretends he doesn't notice the wink that follows.

"Fine," he dismisses, looking away before Dream's gaze can pin him down and leave him breathless. "Go on then."

There's a hand on the small of George's back, guiding them both to the side as Dream parts, and it doesn't dip any lower or play with the belt loop on his pants, but it could still be mistaken for something romantic, maybe too close, too dangerous. And although George is sure that it's not intended like that, he's not sure if he should question the intent and risk reading too far into something completely platonic.

He doesn't listen when Dream kindly asks the people in front of his locker to move, holding his book and staring away with an expression that he hopes will be perceived as bored and not worrisome. Sappnap would normally be the one to fend off the people that George can't be bothered to pay attention to, and surely everyone knows that Dream is just stepping in for the time being—not creating anything new.

It takes too much effort not to lean into the touch, to not press against Dream's side and act as though they're friends at the very least. And George feels as though every single confused stare that's pointed in his direction has been branded onto his skin well enough for him to notice and fret about later.

To anyone else this could look bad, too comfortable, and for some reason George gets a rush from their attention. It's something dire but it feels far too good. News travels fast though, and even if it is just helping an almost friend get to their locker in time for class, once the story has been recounted and turned into a thousand rumours, that might not be the way Sappnap hears it.

Dream has admirers.

George would be stupid not to see the way his eyes flick from George to them, almost as if he's just flaunting George about to make them jealous and bed them later, and even if annoyance runs red through his bones, it's not the only feeling there when Dream's hand lightens and gives a final help forwards.

"Here we are," Dream says eventually, "Is this your locker?"

He smiles, lets go of George completely and takes it upon himself to lean against the red door next to them, somehow deciding it'd be best to stay there, with George, and not leave him alone in the way he's meant to.

"Yeah," George nods. It's barely still hands that reach for the lock, twisting it open under Dream's

prying stare, and there's a taunt in those green eyes that George isn't sure he likes.

Dream's in his periphery, acting as though he can't be seen as he watches George's every move and gesture, chewing on the inside of his mouth and allowing his head to fall to the side with a small silver *thud*.

It'd be a lie to say the motion's not attractive, Dream's features painted in orange with small specks that flicker red in alarm—almost as though he has better places to be but is sucking it up so he doesn't have to part from the other's side. Even the way he blows his lips and tries to catch fallen strands of hair could be seen as endearing, but George shouldn't be watching, let alone be thinking indecent thoughts about the guy that's definitely off limits, so he takes a breath and tries to calm down.

Tearing his eyes away is still hard.

"Why are you still here?" George asks, making sure not to look at the other while he says it.

Silence for a second. An answer scrambling to be formed in the air.

"Well Sapnap isn't here," Dream starts, "I just figured you'd like to have some company."

Exactly what George thought. "We're not friends though."

"We could be," Dream smiles, "We could be anything you want."

"I'm friends with your brother, not you." George makes sure to add the emphasis it needs, shoving the book into his locker and taking another out with the intention of leaving right there and then. He doesn't let Dream's words sink past surface level, giving him a hollow glance when he shuts the locker and stares up, strong and confident. "So it might be best if you went to class."

He keeps up the confidence for mere seconds, melting when Dream's lips part and a piercing is dragged through ivory teeth and into his mouth, snapping back when George's eyes move to stare at it. Chrome green stares back at him too, follows George down to his lips and then back up, and a small laugh manages to break the bubble that George created around himself.

"Pretty," Dream mumbles, almost as though it wasn't meant to escape. And for someone that looks so tough, the blush on his cheeks grows so easily to oppose that. Tension hangs, Dream shaking it off far quicker than George can. "Fine," he agrees. "We don't have to be friends, but I can still offer my company for the time being."

"Actually, I have places to be," George frowns, shaking off the weakness to try and slip back into something subtle.

People are staring, People shouldn't be staring.

Metal rings cool against George's skin, flashing him with blue for half a second when he pulls his hand back without realising what's going on. The textbook he had pulled from his locker is plucked from his hands, calloused fingers running over slender ones for less than a second. But no matter the time, the touch is still enough to make George flinch.

There are annotations on the cover, George's own handwriting dissipating in front of his eyes as it's pulled under Dream's.

"Chemistry," Dream reads, tilting his head to one side, "I have that too, I'll walk you there."

“You’ll be in a different room,” George mutters. He leans forward to snatch his book back. “It’d be unnecessary.”

“Science classrooms are always together,” Dream counters, “I wouldn’t have to be walking with you, we could just be walking to similar places at the same time, next to each other.”

There’s a dorky smile, nothing too sexual or alluring, and somehow George finds himself replicating the notion, the muscles in his cheeks hurting when he tries not to make it too obvious.

“Fine,” he murmurs, rolling his eyes. He makes sure his locker is completely shut, feeling his emotions blur as he coasts down the hall, other people’s confusion slicing through his thoughts as Dream tries to keep up with his stride.

He makes sure not to wait, tries not to let anyone misinterpret their walk, and he’s swallowed by the rumours and the rush as Dream jogs next to him, drowned by the weights in clunky shoes and sharp, metal accessories. Alien touches are brushed off before they can even land, George making sure that Dream keeps just the right amount of distance, and even though he tries not to notice it, the way that Dream is so desperately trying to stay by his side forces a bashful smile onto his face.

It’s a short walk, hallways passing by quickly as George takes a stride upon himself. And when he’s stopping in front of his room, Dream stopping right next to him, there’s more than puzzle on his mind.

“Why are you still here?” George questions.

Dream is hovering above him, not looking as out of place as he should.

“Because this is my class,” Dream shrugs.

Blackened scepticism drips from George’s tongue, his posture defensive even though one touch could make him crumble. “We’re in the same class and you didn’t even know I’m a senior?”

“Shut up,” Dream scoffs, although the news doesn’t seem to have shocked him too badly. “You didn’t know about it either.”

“I guess.”

A hand raises, landing flat on George’s shoulder, and it’s strong, almost spellbinding. And George has to do his best to not think about the way those hands connect to strong forearms and veins that flash temptation in green—burning hot embers and a body tainted by sex and lust and all the things that George pretends he hasn’t been thinking about.

Maybe they’re out of sight and maybe they’re not, but Dream doesn’t seem to care when he drops his head down and talks directly into George’s ear.

“You actually have to walk through the door if you don’t want to be late.”

A crimson blush stays on George’s face for the whole hour.

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Lunch without Sapnap is worse than imaginable.

It's not that George doesn't *want* to sit with Karl and Quackity and whoever else is on that table. But when there isn't someone between them to soften the comments and make George feel included, going there by himself feels daunting.

So George sits in the library, shackles on his feet that keep him in a corner on a table while he eats banana chips out of a plastic bag and these moments have never exactly felt secretive but right now George feels as though it's life or death. He's halfway through another bite, knees pressed up against his chest and bag strewn across a table while he curses Sapnap to hell and back for not being there, when he hears a thud from the other side of the room.

His head shoots up, eyes widening as he glances around to see if anyone else has walked in. And up until that point George had heavily been under the impression that he was there alone, so in all honesty he doesn't know how to react.

The hand holding the bag lowers, pink lips stretched into a neutral expression. George doesn't make the effort to get up and investigate, but he does try and shrink back, seeing how small he can make himself while not making the conscious effort to help the problem.

It could be anyone. There's a chance that George doesn't even need to worry, but the steam blows from his ears and the concern grows on his face before he can convince himself of that. The library was meant to be quiet, tranquil. And until then it was, so the hard thrum of George's own thoughts battling it out are more than unwelcome.

His lunch gets pushed into his bag, bitter regret in George's pupils when he pulls his legs down so his feet can touch the floor. A quick motion sends the bag tumbling onto the ground, a book being pulled out and put in its place to give off the illusion of indifference, and when the pages are opened and George's thumb can graze against the sharp cut of paper, he can only hope that there's no one paying attention enough to see that he's not really swallowing the words.

Plum fumes wrap around his ankles and fill George's senses with sweet perfume, something he's sure he would have noticed earlier, and it's another thud, maybe quieter or George just hasn't been listening out for it enough, but it's definitely there and it's definitely recognisable.

Curiosity getting the best of him, George leans forward, making sure to keep his arms on the table and his head in the pages, just to have an excuse in case there really is someone there. And it's just a few books between them, shelves piled high where people have thrown them about, so upon closer inspection George thinks that he can make out two figures.

They aren't quite touching, one has their arm up to cage the other in but they're facing each other with hands on hips and slightly strewn clothing. For a moment George finds himself staring, because he's sure he's seen the jacket on the taller before, and he thinks he might be able to pin it back to a recent memory if he tries but nothing immediately comes to mind.

The books manage to hide quite a lot, most of the interesting details like faces or shoes all being hidden by the frames. George would stare for longer but he doesn't want to be rude.

Sneaking glances makes George feel dirty but he's doing nothing wrong, just observing his surroundings and wondering why two people would make the school library their spot to flirt and mess about. *But if anything more actually happens then George will be leaving before he can take another breath.*

There's a hand on a waist, dark nail polish tracing over the material of a black shirt, and there's a picture of George in the same position, maybe standing with a guy he shouldn't and feeling powerful in red marks, that flashes through his mind in full colour for half a second, impossible

wishes.

Words printed on yellow paper don't really make sense, and they'd be easier to read if George was actually invested, but instead he's looking everywhere but in front of him, taking one last glance through the window of books and coming face to face with the last person on the planet.

It's just his luck really.

Dream's eyes are on his, staring with such intent that George doesn't even think he can tear away, and there's the panic stricken wonder of when he was noticed, if Dream has known that George was there from the very start and has been flaunting his actions because he really doesn't care about the effects, or this is the genuine nervous smiles and reserved moment that they definitely shouldn't happen.

The barely healed mulberry on his neck has never looked so apparent as George gives a weak, slightly embarrassed, smile following a wave then points his gaze to the floor.

Moments pass with no real conviction; George lets his knee bounce and foot tap against the ground. And maybe sitting outside with his friends wouldn't have actually been a bad idea, because now he's trapped between four walls with Dream, his thoughts, and whoever the fuck else managed to get in here.

Silence dances for another second, the padding of footsteps leading the slam of a door, dark wood clicking into place and leaving trails of unsaid disclosure where the air should be.

Breathing softly, George plays with the corner of a page, letting his fingers trail over the printed words, and he's managed to go back to a quiet place, not bothered by the tapping of glass or rush of wind from a barely open window, when the slam of a bag onto his table makes him jump.

"Boo."

"What the fuck?" George exclaims, far too loud for a library but he's still trying to calm his breaths so he doesn't really care.

Dream's flashing him a smile, pulling a chair out from the opposite side of the table and slinking into it as though he was invited—as if he and George are friends. There's a certain ruffle to his hair, the way it's stuck up and slightly tousled, and there's a redness to Dream's lips that George shouldn't be paying attention to, like he's been bitten until he's sore, maybe by the same person he was just with.

"You look," George pauses, "Messy."

Dream nods like it's funny. "I just made out with a girl with a tongue piercing," he gushes, "It was awesome." There's a proud look on his face, a smile on his lips that looks slightly dumb but George refrains from making a comment on it.

In all honesty, George doesn't want to hear about whoever Dream tongue-fucked in between the bookshelves, and thankfully he doesn't get all of the details but the far away look in Dream's eyes tells him everything he'd need to know. His pupils are slightly blown, awe present in green eyes, and on anyone else the look could be mistaken for inexperience, but Dream manages to make it look confident—his head hanging down when he laughs.

"Right," George mutters.

Something sour rests on the tip of his tongue, making the face he pulls slightly pointed, and it'd be

stupid to think it goes unnoticed.

“Piercings are great Georgie,” Dream continues, “You have no idea.” He shakes his head, leans forward in a position that doesn’t look comfortable and then uses his hand to prop up his face. Knowing smiles are sewn onto his features, something so coy managing to appear so astonishingly subtle as Dream looks at him with heavy eyelids. “Or you do?”

George scoffs. “Don’t you have friends to hang out with?” He counters, “Maybe knives to sharpen.”

“Wow, is that what you think of me?” Dream laughs, faking hurt, and even if George doesn’t want it to, the innocent flirting still manages to get to him. “And you have friends too, I’ve seen you with them.”

“Well I decided to stay in here today,” George dismisses.

The air welcomes his words with a comforting embrace, even having the decency to try and swipe at the legs of George’s chair and nearly make him tumble from where he balances precariously. Unfortunately, George doesn’t need help embarrassing himself so he decides to take it with a brave face, pretending he’s not cursing the world for pushing him and Dream together while he sits.

“So did I then,” Dream nods. “Can I sit with you?”

“You already are.”

The raise of an eyebrow is fuelled by fake annoyance, amber lines forging small creases. “Well can I stay?”

Dream smells like someone’s perfume, lilac swirls and rose petals, and George manages to stick to his morals enough to say, “I don’t know—”

“It’ll be fine,” Dream assures him, “No one has to know.”

The weight behind the words doesn’t go unnoticed.

If it’s even possible, the book in George’s hands becomes more boring. He glances at Dream out of the corner of his eye. Pretending that the drag of a piercing or the way that Dream’s eyes go gooey and sparkle when he focuses on a stray freckle that George barely even knows he has isn’t noticeable.

A conversation never properly starts. George pushes his attention to the side and tries to let Dream know that they shouldn’t actually be speaking. And the fact that his best friend’s brother has decided to take the time out of his own day to come and sit with George rather than his own friends is far too vocal.

George wonders what Sapnap would think of it—whether he’d understand that company is just company, or he’ll scold Dream later for being as bold as to sit with someone like George, someone who he’s barely even been introduced to. But Sapnap might never find out, Dream might not mention it and George definitely won’t, so really who would rat them out if something did happen, something less than pure.

George can entertain it for a moment, stare off into the distance and let his lips go wet with saliva and caramelised hopes, but before he can really delve into it there’s thick honeycomb slicing sweet through his thoughts.

“So what are you doing?”

Dream’s head is on his arms, on the desk, looking like an overgrown tree where he sits and stares up at George as though he’s some kind of saint.

There’s indifference on George’s brow. “Nothing.”

Tension can lie thick in blues in the air, hovering around them and forcing them closer in proximity, and Dream seems to take it as a hint to try and keep George’s attention on him, making small comments every now and then just to remind George of his large and dangerous presence.

Guilt consumes George as he sits, flooding his senses and making him hate how lust has managed to make him so weak. And if no rumours come from the fact that Dream is sitting right in front of him in a secluded part of the library with fresh love bites on his neck, then George will owe the universe his life.

What makes it worse is that Dream seems to know everything he should do to make George swoon. He bites on his lip to let him know he’s wanted, touches his own arms lightly to draw George’s attention to the way his hands flex and subtle muscle can flash, and it might not be gentlemanly but the way that Dream’s eyes dip from George’s down to his lips makes warmth spread through his body like a wildfire.

“I can’t believe we’ve never really spoken before,” Dream drones, keeping up an eye contact that George doesn’t think he can pull away from. “Normally I’d be all over a pretty guy like you.”

Charm oozes from his tone, pink saccharine and cranberry smiles, and he may be doing a lot but it definitely works.

George lets out a small laugh, trying not to jolt too much and suppress the sounds he wants to make.

“Too much.” George rolls his eyes. “At least make it believable.”

God knows where the confidence to talk back came from, but George latches onto it as quickly as he can, throwing a smile in the other’s direction with a small quirk to his brow.

“What?” Dream asks, amused.

“You’re laying it on too thick,” George explains. “It’s disingenuous.”

A small hum. Dream making a line with his lips and nodding as though he’s taking on the information and seeing if it caters to him at all. For a moment George wonders if he’s crossed a line, maybe introduced himself into a joke that was there to ridicule him and not make him laugh, but Dream’s gaze fends off all worries.

“I’ll remember that for the next time I flirt with you,” he says, not stilling when the world around him does.

“We were flirting?” George questions.

“Of course.” Dream says, as though George is just being naïve. And even when he lets orange concern drop onto his features the same playful smile is still there. “Unless you don’t think I’m attractive too.”

Flirting is a word that sounds so serious, so ridiculously formal even if it makes George feel like

some teenage girl with a crush on an unattainable band member, and he's not quite sure how to react, how to respond to the clear invitation to trouble, so he keeps his eyes wide and his mouth open.

"I uh—"

"That face you make is pretty," Dream says, effectively cutting George off with another statement to leave him dumbfounded.

"What face?" He asks, although he's not sure if he really wants the answer, especially if it'll make his stomach twist even more than it already has.

"That one," Dream says, lifting a finger to hover over George's skin. "You like, scrunch your nose up a bit, and purse your lips, it's cute."

As if to emphasise the point, Dream almost replicates the expression, George watching as though he understands what's going on. And it's a question of whether he's more confused by the fact he's being called pretty, or he's being called pretty by Sapnap's brother.

"Oh, thank you."

"Do you think I'm pretty too?" Dream bats his eyelashes, teasing.

The bait is too obvious and George doesn't take a leap to try and grab it. He lets his head tilt, eyes narrowing with all questions held tight to his lips. And the answer is so clear that it almost jumps off of George's tongue, the truth of Dream's attractiveness something he should be embarrassed about noticing so quickly.

Unsafe territory approaches so quickly, Dream playing mellow songs with his hum to try and lead George along and play him as though he's mindless, just some toy for him to use and then drop once he's had his fun. Guys like Dream don't like guys like George, that's simple, a fact even, so the mere humiliation of being used like this is the only thing that leaves George silent.

Definitely not the fact he's scared that he won't be able to stop himself from confessing something more if he lets his tongue slip.

"Come on, you can say it," Dream pushes.

He doesn't take the hint, see George's half-annoyed glare and back off, instead he stands his ground, something similar to the way that Sapnap treats him.

"You know you're not ugly," George says eventually, relenting. He raises an eyebrow, both of his elbows on the table as he gives a pathetic attempt to what (at least on his end) definitely isn't flirting.

"It'd still be nice to hear you say it," Dream continues. Metal rings are pushed around in a loop, twisting around his finger and going cloudy with the heat, and George wonders how they'd look on his own hands, renaissance painted fingers being pushed through the gaps and staying there while someone else plays with them. "I won't tell anyone you think I'm hot, princess."

"Shut up Dream." George lets out a light scoff, words fogging in the air and flying away with no real aim for where they'll land. He might find Dream attractive but there's no way he'll feed into his ego like that. A moment passes, George looking back with confusion before tacking on, "And don't call me that."



Dream chuckles. "Sapnap said you were snarky."

It's pathetic how quickly the world can come crumbling down. Glass shatters, peach clouds fall away, and the scent of perfume goes ill-tasting and makes George's nose turn up. Sapnap's brother, that's all Dream is and it's all he'll ever be. Locked pinkies and painted promises are drawn in black and white, George paying attention to each frame, and it's betrayal that makes his shoulders stiffen and blood freeze.

"Leave," he mutters, defeated.

Still, Dream doesn't get the memo. "You don't mean that," he goads, tone light and rippling with honey.

George sighs; he watches Dream's expression flicker, and his snake bites be tugged between his teeth. And even the small way his hair falls down with lack of style even manages to look alluring.

"You're staring," Dream sing-songs.

"Fuck off."

A laugh follows the scraping of a chair on rough floors. Dream picks his bag up and lets it fall over his shoulder, his grin being pulled out of place when he blows his lips out and presses his thumb to the corner to wipe and check if they're still swollen.

*They are.*

"Fine, bye Georgie," Dream says eventually. There's not enough time to analyse the tone, maybe check if the last twenty minutes were real or something George made up to make himself feel less desperate.

Instead George finds himself giving a small wave, just barely keeping a mottled pink off of his cheeks as Dream looks him up and down and darkens his eyes.

Cherry is in the last of Dream's words. "I'm sure I'll see you around."

Watching him walk away might be too far so George doesn't do it. He slumps further into his seat, letting out a groan that bubbles straight from the back of his throat, and the one thing he's asking himself is why Dream chose him. The one thing he knows he can't have.

In the end it's all boiled down to some sick game, George being a pawn in a losing battle where he's yet to give up his queen even though it's the only real move left. And he's standing by the side-lines, already having been taken by the opposing side and knowing he can't do anything about it. Maybe he can, maybe he just doesn't want to.

Giving into teasing would be too simple, but George lets himself fall for a second. The opportunity of something pretty sinking on his smile. Dream isn't bad, George could definitely do worse.

His book gets shoved into his bag, the packet of banana chips sticking to his hand as he checks the time on his phone to see how long he has left.

It's barely minutes.

George pretends he doesn't feel himself being stared at when he leaves that day.

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Okay, so George has a crush on Sapnap's brother, so what?

It'd be difficult not to, and it's no surprise that Dream manages to bed someone new every week, with those eyes keeping people away would be harder than getting them to climb in next to him. So George can shift the blame somewhere else, keep his head lolled to one side when he lays on his bed and pointedly ignores Sapnap's calls even if he swears that's not what he's doing.

It may be useless to try and ignore your best friend of however many years just because you find his brother mildly attractive, no scratch that, extremely attractive, but either way it's still something that makes George's sense stop working.

Quite frankly, he's confused, unsure of what to do with himself now that he's gone and found someone so perfect that he can never even have. It's hard to sleep, hard to eat, and it might be better if George was allowed to accept the feelings, tell his best friend about all the things his mind brushes over when he's lulling himself to sleep, but Sapnap can never know. That's the real pain of it all.

George might not tell Sapnap everything, but they still have a certain level of trust, and that should encompass mindless crushes and pent up frustration. And normally it would, George can't count the amount of times that Sapnap's come to him with saccharine on his lips and a tale of a pretty student in his violin classes tumbling from his throat, and there have been times where George has done the same. But this time it's different.

There's more frustration than normal, more unspoken feelings that will forever go unsaid, and maybe George can blame his every bad decision from here on out on the fact that he hasn't been able to go over his stupid plans with someone else before he goes through with them.

It's a question of whether or not Sapnap would understand the fact that George can't really control who he likes, one that George will likely never ask. And sure, George may be able to stop himself from actually reaching out to Dream and inviting him over and into his space, but it's still hard to keep his mind from roaming.

Sapnap wouldn't like it, sure, but then again, Sapnap doesn't like a lot of the things that George does.

Moonlight crafted hands form an impossible arch, George's head tipped to one side to let him stare out into black nothingness as he thinks. And it's been the same picture for days, George stumbling to school and sitting with no-one, refusing to let Dream drive him home even if the walk is long and the bus is cramped, just because he can't get the image out of his mind.

It's crooked smiles and sharp teeth, red hickeys and the promise to bruise George up in the same way that keeps it's space in his thoughts, rhythmic ostinato.

George's room is warm, it's one of the few things he's been able to process. His skin is bare, pale and exposed other than the pair of shorts that could be mistaken for underwear that rest low on his hips. Alabaster is sticky to the touch, lips are red and swollen from nobody's teeth but his own, and it's all so much, so shrouded in limelight that George half thinks the heat will be the death of him.

Black hair can fall onto George's forehead, skin can pale at just the thoughts in his own head, and the goosebumps that sit on his skin are from something that George doesn't think he can hold back.

It's all so quiet—George's whole house feeling abandoned even if he knows it's not, and the

feeling of being alone and constrained only with the invisible ropes that keep him down, makes everything feel a thousand times more real.

The vibrator sits still in its packaging stashed away under the wood of George's side table, hidden under layers of clothing and a half opened pack of skittles that he keeps for rainy days, and even if George isn't looking directly at it, he knows it's there. Maybe he's thought about opening it, pressing batteries from the small pack he'd stolen from a cupboard downstairs into the slot to see if it actually works, but there hasn't been much time to entertain the thought with everything else that's been passing by.

It's hypnotising, like he's being dragged under by some terrifying thought that he should never have, and for some reason, George lets himself go.

Dream's unattainable, his touch should burn, be something supernatural that George can never feel, and yet that's why the temptation is so much stronger. Because if George is standing on ice then Dream is blanketed by fire, things that are never meant to meet going up in smoke and flames when they finally do.

Dream is attractive.

George almost blushes at the thought.

He's dangerous too.

Frustration is what sits heavy on the tips of George's fingers, it's what makes him drag the digits down his chest and etch patterns onto his own skin in one fatal swoop. It's cold lines and deep breaths, and before George knows it he's letting his eyes glaze over, go clear with non-existent tears and almost fall shut to reveal the paradise that lays beneath, something sweet like honey or strawberry sherbet.

The twist in his stomach is only getting tighter, making his lips part and neck stretch as he leans back fully, trains a fuzzy gaze on the handle of a brown oak cabinet. One arm can reach far enough to grab the end, drag it open and stay hovering for a moment, almost as though the bones in George's body are screaming at him to rethink what he's about to do.

Dream's eyes stare into his soul. They're green like new beginnings, like emeralds and deep seas, and the edges of sickness too, and a shudder rips through George's frame before he can stop it.

He's resting on his back, arm starting to ache as he lets it hover above a large box, and there's some unheard of edge to George that manages to feel powerful with his hand on his chest and his tongue pressed up against the backs of bone white teeth.

Ivory snags at perfect pink.

Dirty blond hair can trace over George's chin, fake kisses pressing to the dip of his throat, and if George really squints then he can almost imagine the drag of black snakebites on his abdomen, tracing over the rise and fall of pointed hip bones, just enough to leave marks but staying silent in a place where no one but George will be able to see.

The box falls onto the sheets next to him, George's other hand coming up to land on his chest and trail down to rest on the flat of his sternum. He can't look at himself, can't let his mind process everything that he's doing just in case he'll start to realise that having these thoughts aren't right, and Sapnap is the very last thing on George's mind when he lets his fingers thread a button back through it's loop to drag dark material down past slender thighs before kicking it off and to the

floor.

He's still wearing underwear, able to keep most of his modesty behind thin fabric, but it's also the most exposed that George has ever felt, sitting by himself with an audience of no-one and wondering what it'd be like to have his best friend's brother keeping him warm.

A voice is gravelly, ringing in George's ear and muttering his name over and over again, almost as though it's a taunt. And George half-wishes that he was the type of guy to go out and find himself someone to take home every other night, because then maybe his own touch wouldn't feel so life-changing.

His breath is heavy, like liquid gold in his lungs, and George wonders if he'll be able to keep the guilt from taking over his nerves and causing that violent shake to reside in his palms for much longer or soon he'll look as much of a mess as he feels.

Crimson red lust is on his lips, something dark in his heart that feels so unspeakably flawless, and even though he can't force himself to stop, George can't bring himself to look at what he's doing when he's picking at black cardboard to open up the box.

It's bad, awful even, but it's the most alive that George has ever felt. He's blushing at nothing, letting his posture twist and skin burn, and even he can feel the small sparkle in his eyes when he thinks about Dream's hands on his body, metal rings leaving blue as they slide over every muted expanse of skin.

Jerking off is normal, George thinks, but getting hot and bothered over your best friend's brother isn't.

A small bottle of lube sits unopened in the corner of George's beside table, the seal plastic and wrapping around the neck permanently, and George's fingers slide over it clumsily as he tries to pick it up without having to really pay attention to what he's doing.

His underwear is low on his waist, sharp hip bones pressing against the material and guiding it up so that the peek of George's v line is only just able to disappear under it. He feels sultry, almost seductive, as though he should be putting on a show even though no-one's watching. And maybe in the back of George's mind there are eyes on him at all times, deep viridian leaving scorch marks on his skin.

Marbled breaths show up hot under George's nose, deep breaths making his head fuzz when he turns to one side and lets his eyes fall shut. Dream's hands would feel large on his hips, they'd clamp down hard, leave pomegranate bruises that George could trace his palms over and feel scarlet rub off onto his fingertips, and the bottle of lube falls down on the bed next to him, seal broken and lid ajar.

Dream would be a passionate lover. George half wonders if he's the type to kiss and tell, share stories of his conquests with a smirk on his lips or their affair would be something secret—stolen and oh so destructive. It's sinful thoughts, something vulgar and unsporting, yet George can't stop himself from indulging in it until his eyes feel black.

Hands trail light down George's chest, trimmed nails catching on milky skin and pulling red from the undertones of pale stretches. He knows what he likes, keeps himself on edge by pressing down hard on off-seconds, and it's not enough to draw a moan but it's definitely far enough to make George's lips part.

Darkness makes his fingers look slender, lone breaths heavy and kept afloat by George's own guilt.

He lets his knuckles catch on the fabric of his underwear, barely dipping under the waistband as he bites down on pink and wonders if anyone will be able to hear him fret.

The situation makes him shiver, his collarbones pointing to the sky as he feels himself tremble and pause. And after a feeble attempt to ignore Sapnap and his worries, doing something like this only feels like rubbing salt into the wound.

Two hands rest on the tops of George's underwear, his left doing most of the work as it drags the material down just enough for George to see his own skin. There's the dip where joint meets joint, the tops of slender thighs stretching until translucence becomes pearl. And George knows he has a nice body, so he can't feel mad when he can't stop his own hands from traveling.

His knees point up, legs spread slightly just to accommodate his own wishes as an unsure grip helps to drag his underwear down to his ankles before kicking them off with complete disregard for where they land. Heat makes itself known in a blooming red, hair sticking to George's forehead as he works himself up towards something that's barely even immoral, and lets himself feel the pleasure he's been holding back for so long when he lets his legs drop, cock sitting half hard and untouched between his legs.

Ivory teeth press down a tad harder, George's breath steadying as he glances off to the side, far too burdened by his own heavy fantasies to care about the way he'll look tomorrow—with red swollen features, and bags under his eyes from staying up to do something so profane. His body is glowing, eyes burning holes into the wall above, and eventually one hand finds that same bottle of lube, twisting the cap until it breaks and falls onto scratchy sheets with George's gaze following.

It's heavy to the touch, cold when George pours some into his palm, and there's a slightly wet feeling that makes him suck in a short breath and falter for half a second.

Moments like these shouldn't be spent alone, George thinks. He wants a body by his side, a larger hand to rest over his and guide them down to clasp over everything, and it may only be a crush, something meaningless and easy passing, but George still feels as though he's bridging over into new territory.

George once made out with a guy that had a lip piercing, a labret. It was cold, slightly strange, and the guy had just got it pierced, so really he wasn't meant to be kissing at all, but thought George was pretty, even when George took it a bit too far and tried to tug on the metal, making the guy gasp out in pain and disconnect their lips immediately.

In all honesty, it wasn't that different to kissing anyone else, messy and inexperienced, and it had left George slightly disappointed and wanting more, but there was still the knowledge that metal poked through and brushed over George's own lip, and that did something for George.

He imagines soft lips and black plastic, the way two piercings instead of one would feel against his neck, maybe even around him. And he trails a slick palm down his stomach until it's resting just above where he wants it to be.

Sapnap still sits on the edge of George's thoughts, keeping him from going any further, and maybe if George tilts his head and angles his view towards where his phone sits cold on dark wood then he'll be able to see the flurry of unanswered messages, all going up in a panic just because George is too busy drowning in his own thoughts to do anything about it.

Dream is what George thinks of when he finally wraps a hand around himself. Dream is the name on the tip of George's tongue when he moves his palm in slow, languid motions, and the twist he gives to his own grip, the way he squeezes down slightly as he strokes himself until he's fully hard,

is enough to make George whine.

He's slow with his movements, dragging out each long touch enough for it to feel as though it lasts forever, and burning pleasure coils in the pit of his stomach, making hands tremble and meagre arousal grow. The head of George's cock is red, flush and pretty, and curving up slightly towards his own abdomen.

Peach fingertips trail over the length, hot embers causing the weak sensation to run hot and make George's nerves weep. His own feeble touches elicit a whiny breath from his lips, and he half wishes he had a pillow or something similar between his legs so he could push back against it and alleviate some of the pressure.

He sucks in a sharp breath, stares out into the lone walls of his room, repositioning himself slightly so that his hand can travel further, let go of his cock and dip down to somewhere new. It feels odd, slightly strange, and George doesn't quite know what he's doing, so he hopes that the way his fingers almost prune with the amount of excess lube he's put on will make things easier.

George knew he'd find himself in a position like this at one point, and he lets slick fingers trail over his rim without ever going further, teasing himself by letting one touch falter and drag. He's never had anything in there before, never found the right opportunity to have it happen, and George isn't particularly opposed to the idea, but lying in the silence, sitting suspended in time with images of hands around his thighs playing on repeat, makes just the possibility seem daunting.

Still, somehow George manages to feel pretty with marbled skin and mottled white marks, freckles coming out even though there's no way half of his body has seen sunlight in eons, and it's the way one leg stretches out, falls down with a bent knee and raises slightly so he's almost taking up the whole width of the bed that gives the illusion of regality.

He lets the feeling linger, squeezing his eyes shut as he tries to ignore the black rectangular box that sits right beside him and only taunts him even more. Orange is the colour that muddles his senses, bleeding into red when George tries to get the angle right, bending his wrist to try and see if he'll be able to slip one finger in without too much resistance.

It's awkward, slightly painful, and it doesn't fill George with the immediate rush of pleasure that he had hoped for but he continues nonetheless, feeling his muscles go lax and pull with resistance as they try to accommodate by the sudden intrusion. His legs don't like the position, they move higher, dangling slightly and one of George's feet finds a place to rest while his other points skyward.

Experimentally, George pushes one finger in and out, trying to find his way around and figure out what's best for him, and eventually, when the sting subsides and immediate pain melts away, George can hear himself sigh and let his head fall back. His jaw pushes up, straight, angled line becoming prominent for no one to see, and George wishes he had someone here to hold close, lie still next to and have them trail soft breaths over that protrusive jawline.

One finger isn't enough, George soon realises. His hands are slender, nails perfectly cut, but he can't reach every angle inside of himself in the way that he wants to. Black nail polish manages to find its way into his mind, the sound of metal rings clunking down onto a side table while George lays sprawled out on his back accompanying it.

Dream's fingers would probably be thicker than his own, he'd probably be able to make George fall apart only on two, by curving them against all the right spots and muttering dirty words against the shell of his ear. The sinlessness on George's expression has been wiped away by something lewd, a new warmth in his tone and flush to his cheeks.

Unable to stop himself, George lets out a soft “fuck” while the tip of a second finger presses to his rim and threatens to push in. Just to keep himself fully present, he reaches his free hand out and struggles to slide more lubricant over his palm before wrapping it around his cock. He hisses, trying not to flinch when his own thumb dips down to press against the slit on the head, and his other fingers dance over the vein on the underside—a stark juxtaposition to the way that George’s own finger thrusts in and out of himself, unconventional tempo.

The second finger is a stretch; George finds himself pushing down onto it despite the pain it brings and when it slides in next to the first the only sensation running pink through George’s veins is pleasure. He stretches himself open, crooks two fingers to one side and then the other.

It feels so personal, and George isn’t sure if many friends know about each others sexual escapades, but Sapnap definitely won’t be hearing about the way that George thought about fucking himself open on a toy that he was just meant to have bought as a joke.

He pushes back against his own hand, noting the way that the angle makes his hand cramp and wrist start to sting and his legs draw together to squeeze against his own forearm. It feels so perfect, like a new kind of sensation that George never even knew he’d be into, and the way he strokes his own cock to match the thrusts only serves to make it better.

Pre-cum falls onto George’s thumb, making his strokes wet and the way he fists his own cock even more strained. The edge of a third finger nudges in, two crooking to one side to try and make room, and George’s hole is red and must be puffy but there’s no one there to heighten the humiliation or point his attention towards it.

“Shit,” he gasps, fucking himself on those three fingers when they’re finally fully inside of him, stretching him out in a way that George didn’t think was possible. “Fuck.”

Each sound he makes sounds needy, as though there’s something else that he’s missing, and when he bucks his hips up and pushes himself down, the pleasure that shoots through him is practically indescribable.

And *that*, that has to be his prostate, because *holy shit* it feels good.

He’s desperate, broken sounds running from his lips as he rubs his fingers against that bundle of nerves over and over again until he’s delirious, chasing pleasure that’s feebly tripping away. His own hand acts as some kind of anchor, a place for George to push back against and know where he’s rooted. And he feels so good like this, almost as though any walls he’d had plastered up can be let down for a few fragile moments.

It lasts for only a few seconds, George keeping the pleasure constant and trying not to squirm too much. But he’s brought back to his senses by the sharp, undying gasp that tumbles embarrassingly from his own lips.

The sound could be muffled by another mouth on his, someone else to swallow the note, but George has to make do with biting down hard on his lower lip, drawing red from strawberry pink. A solo heartbeat rings against his chest, the rise and fall following the way his breath comes out in short puffs, and before George can stop himself he’s dragging those three fingers out and letting his entire body go lax.

The box is practically torn open, plastic coming out and cardboard dropping down in shreds next to it. Barely there luminescence is the only thing that guides George in order to give him a clue as to what he’s doing, and what he doesn’t need gets pushed to the floor—tomorrow’s mess to clean up.

The vibrator is heavy, plasticky and feeling almost odd to the touch, and it's dark, not vibrant in a way that would make George cringe to even pick it up, but it's just enough to be unnerving. Batteries lay just out of reach on George's side table, something he has to stretch to grab and then jam into the slot that he picks at with his nails.

He's clumsy, trying to do everything as quickly as possible, and right now he wishes he could just call Dream and take him up on whatever offer he'd been suggesting.

Doing everything alone gets tiresome.

There's a tremble to his hands when he squeezes lube over the end of the toy, slicks it up and makes sure it's practically dripping, and George feels so open, so ready to have something inside of him, hitting every single spot and making him feel pleasure in a way he's never felt before.

It's big, slightly daunting to look at, but George pushes the feeling down, letting the tip trail down his stomach and past his abdomen, away from his own leaking cock to press against his rim. It catches on the side, makes George shiver before he tries to steady himself and rub the plastic over his entrance.

At the end of the day it's just a vibrator, nothing to be scared of, but the implications still make George shudder. His neck is a bright red, dewy skin sticky with sweet cherry blossom. It's awkward to just hold it there, George having to angle his hips upwards as the toy rubs over his entrance and just stays in place.

Despite it all, George manages to feel powerful—pristine and perfect even when he's on his back with his legs spread. And sure Dream is attractive, he's rugged and well toned, enough charm to make George swoon and double the tension in just one look, but George is sure that he'd have plenty of suitors of his own, if only they saw him like this.

And yet he still finds it in himself to be scared.

*Deep breaths George.*

*One, two...*

The first push is a bigger force than George could have imagined. It makes him keen, lower back lifting as he uses one hand to push the toy into himself and uses the other to stroke his cock. The featherlight touches keep George hard, his cock pink and leaking pre-cum onto his stomach where it'll surely cool and stay sticky on his skin.

It's a shallow thrust, more experimental than anything, but George still tips his head back and tries to hide a high-pitched squeak by biting down on his own bottom lip.

He feels so full, as though he's being worked open even more with every passing second. Another person would be able to move their hand faster, make George writhe and shake by pushing the toy in and out of him with the utmost precision, and he can half-imagine it's another man's cock inside of him instead, some guy with lip piercings in the same place as Dream's and blond hair in the same shade—except he can't imagine that it's Dream, because that'd be wrong.

It'd be wrong.

It's mediocre at best, a small pleasure creeping along with residual pain, and George can't tell if it's meant to feel like this or he's doing something wrong. The way he strokes his cock is weak, his fist is barely squeezing together, mainly because his energy drops with the effort it takes to keep up the unwieldy position.



He fucks himself on the toy until he's tired, skin hot to the touch and saccharine dripping pure from his tongue. And it's when he's getting close to the edge, the feeling in his stomach growing and stretching and twisting around itself so deliciously, when George realises what he could have been feeling this entire time.

The pace he had set wasn't brutal so it's easy to come back from, easy for George to slow the movements and then ease the toy back out of him, only letting the tip trace over his rim before pushing it back in.

All of his senses are heightened, George feeling like molten lava is running thick through him and dragging a sensation that he never wants to pass along too.

And then he flicks on the vibrations.

The scream that George lets out is silent. He's writhing in pleasure, squirming and letting out small breathy sounds that may resemble a name, and it's a struggle to keep quiet knowing he has others in the house, especially since the toy is pulsing and vibrating inside of him with such intensity that George doesn't even think he can move his hand.

"Fuck," he whines, squeezing his eyes shut. "Oh shit, fuck, *fuck*."

It's the taste of his own tongue, nauseating pleasure and raspberry kisses, and the way his own fingers feel as he traces them over the head of his cock, teasing himself and not allowing himself the orgasm he so desperately needs.

The vibrator is easy to handle yet George still has difficulty. His entire body is on fire, the rustling of his sheets managing to drown out the small buzz that follows each shake of the toy. And after a moment he realises that he hasn't actually moved it since he turned it on, only let it sit inside of him and make him weep.

If it's even possible, George's cock throbs and gets even harder, making him hiss as the urgency spreads. It's like a forest fire, out of control and unstoppable as George gets closer to his orgasm, and there's flashes of colour, dark reds melting into blacks in front of George's very eyes. Sharp canines on his neck and black painted fingernails on his thighs, cock thrusting inside of him and fucking him until he's delirious.

Dream would fuck him good, he'd be rough and sweet at the right moments, not stopping for anything and riding the high of George's whiny breaths and incoherent whimpers. And this is ecstasy, this is the feeling that George craves—Dream on his mind as he fucks himself past lust and sense until he's a moaning, writhing mess.

Pleasure only grows quicker, George unable to stop it from flooding into his mind. It makes his hand start moving properly, one thrusting the toy in and out as though someone's between his legs and doing it for him, and the other hand wraps tight around his cock, a sultry breath leaving his bitten raw lips as he pulls quick and fast and pays no attention to the way he's clearly making a mess of himself.

Pre-cum is on his stomach, his fingers are slick, and right now Dream would collapse down on top of him, bite onto the stretch of skin between George's neck and his collarbones, marking him up with red to let everyone know the things they've done, even if Sapnap can't find out those things happened together.

It'd be perfect, tender and soft yet so completely brutal, and it's those last few seconds of pure bliss before George tips fully over the edge, the name of someone secret on his tongue.

Blinding white flashes in front of George's eyes, rendering him useless for a moment as he tries to recover from it, slowing the vibrators movements but not shutting it off. He feels so completely worn out, muscles going shaky as his legs tremble, vibrations sending him so far past overstimulation that he's not sure he even has the energy to shut them off.

The noises he's letting out are embarrassing, dissipating into the open air with no one to actually hear them. Constellations can form and then fall in the time it takes George to come to, and he's making hasty attempts to keep himself conscious as his cock gives a feeble twitch and cum is shooting upwards over his hand and painting his stomach.

"Fuck," George mutters again, speaking it as though it's the only word he knows.

Pulling the toy out is painful, he's so ruined, sweaty and completely limp, and it's the best orgasm that George has ever experienced so there's no telling when he'll be ready to get off the high and clean himself back up.

Post-orgasmic bliss makes him stay where he is. Limbs are sprawled out wildly, sheets likely damp under where George sits. Both hands come up to rest on his chest, feeling the way his heart beats and pushes up to make him rise. The position must have got to George's hand too, because there's a slight sting from where he'd held it in one awkward spot for so long, yet George doesn't really care too much for trying to soothe it.

There's one thing still on his mind though.

In all honesty, George had shocked himself with the things his mind could come up with, and he's letting out a small, embarrassed laugh before he can really think about the implications.

*Dream.*

Dream might only care for George in a physical way, something he's made obvious even if they haven't had the deepest of conversations. And it plays with the strings in George's mind, wrapping red where it shouldn't be. Because technically he's not disobeying Sapnap's wishes if he has sex with his brother but doesn't date him.

They never established a rule about that.

No, no. That wouldn't be right.

George has decency, he has some humility—although when he looks down at himself and really realises the fact that he'd just spent the last however long indulging in the dirty fantasies about Dream that he promised himself he wouldn't, George starts to wonder if any of it really matters.

And maybe the conclusion that George comes to isn't the smartest. Maybe it's a dumb thought that he shouldn't really pay attention to, but the more he thinks about it the more he's able to convince himself to do something stupid, something irreversible.

George's life shouldn't be dictated by what other people do, even if that other person is his best friend. He hasn't been dating, he's barely got friends other than Sapnap, and nobody should have to spend their life walking a fine line that they're always afraid of tripping over, glancing over their shoulder at every other moment just in case there's something they should be cautious of.

Because *fuck it*, George deserves to be happy. He just hopes Sapnap will understand that too.

thank you so much for reading !!

as always, comments/kudos are so appreciated and really make my day !!

also this fic just hit 10k hits !! which i think is so cool, so thank you sm to everyone that's decided to click on this and especially those who left a kudos !!

and then [my twitter](#), maybe come over and follow me for snippets and more dnf stuff :]

## Chapter 4

### Chapter Summary

“If I say yes you have to promise not to tell him,” George pleads, desperate but staying quiet nonetheless. “He can’t know.”

Dream barely even hesitates. “I promise.”

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Bad decisions are never fun to make.

For the most part, they’re terrifying, laced with unease and doused in stardust to make them seem more appealing. And George has made his fair share of mistakes—one time he stole a pen from a bookshop and almost cried when he got caught, another time he pushed a kid down the stairs in primary school just because he hadn’t liked the way he’d talked to him during break, and that young naivety can definitely be excused, but the way that George considers going out of his way to hurt a friend, cannot.

Seeing Sapnap feels like agony—he’s cheerful, bubbling with sky-blue enthusiasm and seemingly no qualms about the state of their friendship, and George only half wishes that he could just shout his worries in the other’s face so he doesn’t have to see that happiness anymore.

Dream’s number is still saved in his phone. It has no photo, no contact name other than “D” and George knows that if he was as good of a person as he pretends he is then he would have deleted it by now, but George isn’t a good person, and a part of the newfound confidence he’s been injecting into his life is to make bad, ill-judged decisions.

And one of those ill-judged decisions is to agree to go and spend the night at Sapnap’s house again.

“It’ll be fun,” Sapnap groans. “Just the two of us, doing friend things like friends should.”

“We hang out all the time,” George complains. “Why can’t you just come to my house? We can have fun there too.”

“No,” Sapnap drags, pulling the words with grey boredom in the rumble of his tone. And the hand he places on George’s shoulder is loose, almost like George can pull away at any moment and Sapnap would understand, as though they’re best friends that can tell when something isn’t quite right or a touch is uncomfortable to bestow. “I like *my* house, with *my* bed and *my* computer.”

“But—”

“No buts,” Sapnap interjects, hands flat on the table between them, and he’s smiling, offering up some innocent proposition that he’ll never be able to see the struggle behind. “You’re coming.”

And George—being the spineless, pathetic mess that only he knows himself to be—nods. He *nods*; letting Sapnap’s grin widen and his own selfish desire fester, growing bigger in the pit of his

stomach as he wonders if Dream will be there too, if he'll show up in his own home and remind George of the way that red looks against his skin, or how perfectly insatiable piercings can seem under a fluorescent light.

Though the feelings are kept off of his face, he forces his expression to stay neutral, refusing to let cherry red lust leak onto the innocence of a paling expression. Sapnap's been his friend for a while, he should be able to tell that something's wrong, and there's a split second where George can feel himself stop, emotions blurring and hands threatening to shake with something black or red or drowned in uncertainty.

Water in a glass tastes like nectar, scrutiny in George's every breath as he downs it to take his eyes away from the other. And the drawl of a word catches his attention for barely a moment, like plans are being made right in front of his face and he's not quite there enough to hear them.

"Fine," George sighs, marble smile cracking with its urgency. "I'll go."

"Fuck yes," Sapnap groans. "We can stop off and grab some snacks on the way."

The question slips out before George can stop it, innocent phrasing twisted by the sharp edge of a tongue. "Will Dream drive us?"

Sapnap doesn't seem phased. "No," he dismisses, "I think he's busy today."

"Busy?" George questions, as though playing it off as some lewd joke will make it better and not just throw him into a spiral of thoughts and uncomfortable feelings.

"Yeah." Sapnap nods, once then twice. "Him and his friends are going to a gig or something, they're leaving before classes are over anyway."

"Oh okay."

The feeling in George's stomach might be disgust.

It's green, mottled and mixed with darker whims as it spins like clay on a potter's wheel. And it's the thought that Sapnap doesn't know, that George almost likes the fact that he doesn't too, because it's barely been days since George had sat on his bed and done the unthinkable to the mere image of Sapnap's brother hovering above him, a boyish grin and a neck branded in pomegranate marks forever printed into his mind, so the unease shouldn't feel this thrilling, even if George can admit it is.

But Dream is going out again and he can find any other pretty guy to sit in bed with and repeat the same, overused routine that's worked on George already, so the saccharine thoughts can melt into something sour and spiral with no semblance of control in George's mind before he's able to process the fact that Sapnap is still staring at him, and that Dream is a just guy that he wants but doesn't have.

He shakes the notion, shoots a small smile in Sapnap's direction to try and ease all of his own worries. And the way his hands slide into his pockets and pinch loose material to try and hide any nerves may be obvious but George still hopes it's not too visible.

"Can I leave now?" George asks, the disinterest in his tone too forced to feel genuine.

Sapnap nods. "Meet me by your locker." His backpack is pulled over his shoulders, digging into his skin slightly where his books weigh the material down. "I'll wait for you."

An apricot sky can glare yellow then pink, George's guilt can grow despite the way that he's pushing it down, and the sound of footsteps padding across faux grass is the clear indication that George needs to tell himself that he's alone again.

Just him, his thoughts, and a grave fault on the tip of a sherbet tongue.

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"Come on," Sapnap groans, shoulder bumping against George's as they walk into the house, bags in hand and lips tugged into stretched smiles. "I can't believe you wanted to just buy a jar of Nutella."

"Nutella is good," George scoffs, rolling his eyes as he taps the door shut with the back of his shoe. "Don't knock it until you try it."

Sapnap's eyebrows raise, a fuelled challenge to each hair, and even if the look is stern, George can tell there's no malice behind it—as though Sapnap can't see a problem with inviting his best friend into his house and letting him walk around like he's still a perfect person.

"Make yourself at home then," Sapnap prods when George hovers uncertainly by the door. "I'll grab a bowl."

Nodding, George turns to throw his things down on the floor. As much as he doesn't want to let a few thoughts ruin their day, it's still hard to not let them filter through, and every time he catches a glimpse of the pale pink and vanilla cloud that circles Sapnap's walk, the reminder of his own shame manages to hit again at full force.

In reality, it's the same few hindrances that keep George standing idle and by himself, completely out of his own element and unsure on what to do about it. Because Dream isn't even here, he's nowhere in sight and should be the very last thing on George's mind, but for reasons unbeknownst, he's the only thing that George can think of.

And even if George wants to take charge and do the unspeakable things that he's held back on for so long, being so completely and utterly consumed by scarlet and sugary thoughts of red lips and completely pullable hair isn't normal.

There's a sick part of him that considers just saying it out loud..

George watches completely blank from the position that definitely shouldn't be comfortable that he's adopted on the couch, with his eyes following his friend as Sapnap makes himself busy by grabbing two glasses and a large bowl that he carries over to where George is sitting. It hits the table with a loud *clink*, commanding attention in a way that George finds admirable, and he continues to stare as Sapnap takes a seat on the couch opposite, all shoes finding their way onto a disorderly pile in the meeting between rooms.

Snacks are made, drinks are poured, and aside from a few small words neither really manage to make conversation.

George blames his own awkwardness, the way he's barely able to look Sapnap in the eye even though they've been friends forever and George hasn't even forced the knife into his back yet. But it's the *yet* that George hangs onto, because all George would need is permission before he's latching onto someone he shouldn't because of his own selfishness.

“Hey,” Sapnap calls, warmth cutting in bright orange tones to make George falter. “Are you okay?”

A moment of silence drags through eons—George pretends to not know what’s being asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been off all day,” Sapnap says. He frowns with genuine concern, not pushing too hard but letting a bridge still form between them. “Are you mad at me or something?”

“What?” George rejects, leaning forward to give Sapnap the only genuine look he’s seen all day, something timid and mildly frightened, a peace offering that will go unheard because the other doesn’t even know why it’s necessary. “Of course I’m not.”

Blood pumps faster, George’s heart thumping as Sapnap’s concern seems to grow and maybe now he can finally look at how his own emotional absence has been hurting his friend too. It’s an awful feeling, when time passes in slower seconds and the edge of Sapnap’s answer doesn’t come immediately, but George forces a smile onto his face during the passing time, hoping that if he tries for long enough then the corners won’t feel weighed down.

*They’re still friends. Nothing can stop them from being friends.*

“Are you sure?” Sapnap asks. “Because it’s been starting to feel like you don’t actually want to hang out with me.”

Tension hangs by a thread, a barely fucked up friendship still so repairable even though George isn’t doing anything that bad. And in reality he’s blowing everything out of proportion, being so completely on edge that every word spoken starts to feel like an attack, but when fear is such a large motivator, George doesn’t know how to stop things from spiralling.

“I’m sure,” he lies, gritted teeth ruining a broad smile. “Now come on, play a movie or something, I just want to have fun today.”

He gets a nod in response, Sapnap doing as asked even if George isn’t telling him everything. And the strain on their friendship is caused by George and George alone, so the responsibility sits heavy on his shoulders and makes him wonder if doing something daring is even worth it.

Life is about taking chances, George reasons, shuffling around so he can lie on his side and just barely see Sapnap out of the corner of his eye, blind to nothingness and hoping that something holy can swoop down and save him from his own sin.

The movie that Sapnap chooses is one of George’s favourites. It’s fast paced, enough to keep his attention at every moment but also having the right pauses where George can glance to the side and check on the time or see how Sapnap is doing. What makes it worse is that Sapnap knows it’s one of George’s favourites, in fact, he himself despises the flick, but he’s still playing it, forcing himself through the hour and a bit stretch just because it’ll make George happy.

Good deeds aren’t unnatural to Sapnap; George has been on the receiving end of too many of his warmer moods, having endured countless hugs and a very strange version of “tough love” that comes in the form of screaming matches over who’s better at chess or a video game or something like that. But Sapnap doesn’t do things he doesn’t like, he doesn’t play games that he doesn’t want to and he doesn’t watch movies that he finds awful. So the both of them sitting in silence, staring at the bright amber glare of a glitching screen only makes George feel like an even worse person.

Self-pity feels like the only option, and the faces that flicker across the screen go completely

unnoticed for half a second before a small hit to George's forehead makes him flinch.

He recoils slightly, glancing down to see what hit him, and when he glances up to see Sapnap with a handful of popcorn and a playful smile, George allows himself to grin back for just a moment. It's only a small gesture but George can't stop the beam from spreading across his face. He leans forward, dipping his hand into the bowl in front of him, and the handful of popcorn he takes gets thrown directly at Sapnap's face.

There's a look of shock, a slight gasp and a mouth gaping open in surprise, but before George can question if he's taken it too far he's being attacked by another shower of sweets, popcorn hitting him directly in the face as Sapnap tries not to laugh and make himself look more of a mess.

For a moment their gazes meet, challenge in their eyes as they both make a sudden move to grab what they can, and it's pure stubbornness that makes George keep up the game.

They're disorderly, having resulted to hiding behind their respective couches as they dash items across the room towards each other, ranging from food to pillows and for once George is thankful that Sapnap's mother has gone out of town for the week so they have the place to themselves, because right now he doesn't want to deal with her walking in on this.

Laughter bursts in the air, Sapnap's tone managing to sound light despite the weight it had held earlier, and even though he's holding onto a secret George lets himself just have fun. Because he and Sapnap are friends, and a random boy shouldn't change that.

He's always liked being able to be let go, do undignified things and not care about cleaning up afterwards. And Sapnap brings out the best of him; he makes him smile and he makes him laugh and most importantly, with him it never feels as though George is being strained to do something he wouldn't want to, so George has never really had to savour these moments, but right now it feels as though he should.

"Stop!" George yelps, laughing bright orange as he pretends to fall to the floor—shielded by the back of the couch.

The world around them rumbles, it shakes and trembles and struggles not to fall apart under the cracking of sharp footsteps. Sapnap's laughter is hysterical, a modern imperfection of red and blue, and although George's grin is fuelled by pink embers and a smile so wide that blood vessels must burst, they're working together, almost as though they're real friends.

"I'll stop when you stop," Sapnap jeers, lobbing a pillow over in George's direction. It falls on top of him, almost splitting with feathers as George tries to not let it hit his face.

Then there's a cry, a deep sound following the layer of content that Sapnap greets when he bursts towards George and clambers over the couch to get a full look at him. Hands meet hands, George trying not to break when he's scrambling to his feet and running back to avoid being caught, and the crescents on Sapnap's face are so lightly painted that under any different shine, George doesn't think he'd be able to see them.

Minutes later they call a truce.

George is balancing on the couch while Sapnap is standing on a table, both so precariously placed that any sudden noise would send them tumbling. And they're pointing their hands towards each other as though either really know how to fight.

Sapnap's smile is so wide and his eyes are large with something happy, and it's the reminder that



George doesn't really need, that no matter what, Sapnap cares for him—they're still friends.

Guards go down with a small huff, George turning to match Sapnap's gaze, and when they look out to see the mess they've caused throughout the room the groan they let loose is synonymous.

For the most part, George makes Sapnap do all the work. He stands to one side, a spoon in a jar of Nutella and his body slumped over the same counter he'd seen Dream lean against before, and it barely takes seconds for him to get comfortable, managing to climb up onto the surface and cross his legs underneath himself so thankfully Sapnap doesn't complain at being the only one that's actually cleaning.

They're both silent and it's beautiful—George lets his posture fall and his eyes go blank, and Sapnap quietly hums under his small stare, and if they move as a unit with Sapnap passing certain things to George who lets them fall into the bin, then George can boil it down to a synchronized friendship that he shouldn't be able to sabotage—no matter how much he's considering doing so.

Neither of them are patient enough to clean everything; after a few minutes Sapnap gets bored. The popcorn on the couch has been mostly cleaned up and it gives them the room to sit back down and try to find something new to watch. And this time George lets Sapnap choose the movie, because really it's the least he can do with all the things he's been considering.

"Do you want to sit with me?" Sapnap asks, leaning into his seat with open arms.

It's a dull scent in the air, forest damp that's earthy and clean like fresh linen, and it lines the edges of Sapnap's hoodie, brings in home even though George is sitting in someone else's. And although it's comforting to some degree George shakes his head, sitting back down where he had earlier and curling up by himself.

"I'm good," he dismisses, shooting Sapnap a small look.

A smile simmers in the air, dissipating and shooting pink sparks that George finely tunes out and with each new second the night drags closer—whole room darkening when clouds move to hide the sun and drown out its amber glow.

Somehow, they manage to force their way through at least 5 movies before George starts to wish he'd brought more comfortable clothes. The jeans he's wearing are starting to feel stiff, and George doesn't feel like falling asleep in them. (And at this point Sapnap should just clear out a drawer for George to store spares, because he seems to be in this same predicament far too many times.)

"Sapnap," George groans, leaning his head to one side. "Can I borrow some clothes?"

"Of course," Sapnap nods, pointing his head towards the staircase behind him. "You know where to go."

"Thanks."

George's feet land lightly on the floor below him, the slow creak oblivious to the weight that should be forcing George down harder. And the sweatshirt that he wears has been rolled up to his elbows so he has to wrap his arms around his stomach to stop himself from getting cold while he walks.

Sapnap's room is easy to find—George has been there too many times to get lost on the way. The door pushes forward with ease, the plain strokes of slender fingertips pressing against the dark wood, and he leaves a small crack open just because he doesn't want to make the effort to click it back into place.

He goes straight towards one of Sapnap's drawers, pulling it open to grab a pair of sweatpants that he hopes will fit, and he shimmies out of his jeans to drag the new material up past milky skin so it rests just above his hips.

The strings on the wristband get pulled tight, a little bow over the front where George attempts to loop them, and he's not quite sure where to leave his own clothes so he lets his jeans stay piled in crumples on the ground below. There's no visible mirror on the wall or on a table, so George makes do with the glare of a black screen from Sapnap's monitor—doing his best to make out his reflection even though it's slightly fuzzy. And if he pulls up the hem of his sweatshirt and turns ever so slightly to try and see how he looks, then he hopes that no one's standing outside to see the act of vanity.

A thud hits the walls seconds after George is done, his fingers curling around the doorframe as he pokes his head out slowly, scanning over the wallpaper to distinguish what Sapnap must have broken to elicit a sound like that.

It's murmured voices, deep honey mixed with the homely pine that's always been present, and George can recognise the tone almost immediately with the amount of times he's been thinking about it in the past few days. Realistically, Dream was bound to come home at some point, it's his house after all and it's far past midnight, so him being back shouldn't surprise George in the way it does. But it's the chance of a friendship getting ruined after all of the strained repair that makes him tick.

He and Sapnap are on good terms, they have been for the whole day. But at the same time, Dream is a new opportunity that George swore he would take, so is he really going to sit back and let the nerves take charge when something special presents itself?

A mess of brown hair brushes over the door, George's eyes staring out at nothingness when he tries to wait and see if Dream will walk past just so he can avoid anything disastrous, but nothing comes and sure enough, George is left waiting.

There's tension in the pink undertones, George's cheeks feeling hot even though he's barely moved, and the sheer disloyalty of standing there in Sapnap's clothes as he thinks of his best friend's brother is almost enough to make George break.

Eventually, he pulls himself out of it. He shakes off his head, rumples his hair with shaky movements to try and sort it into something presentable, and it's a panic stricken move to be checking his appearance before walking back into the room—one that Sapnap will definitely notice but George isn't too sure that he cares.

The neckline of the sweatshirt feels too tight, like George has to grab onto the collar and drag it down to stop himself from losing breath. Walls are blurry, dark nights are bright, and the world is oblivious to George's struggle as it paints his footsteps in bright white and gives a clear track to whatever could be looming after him.

As expected, when George gets back to the living room Sapnap isn't alone. The two guys are engaged in a conversation that he can't hear at first, and George clears his throat slightly when he walks in, ducking his head down to hide his face when they both turn to look at him.

"Hi Georgie."

A familiar drawl, saccharine melting on a plastic tongue and honey welding each thought together until nothing makes sense.

“Hi,” George tries to smile. He looks up and there Dream is, with snake bites and a dirty smile as he sits with eyeliner rubbed dark under his eyes as though he’s been through more than George could ever imagine. He’s sitting on the couch directly in front of him, sprawled out as though he owns the place (maybe because without Sapnap’s mom there he probably does). And although praise sits heavy in George’s thoughts the only thing that manages to escape his lips is a strained, “I was—I was sitting there.”

He was. Dream is sat in the same dent that George had moulded for himself and has pressed himself up so he can face the rest of the room and stare out into the kitchen, but even after hearing that fact, Dream makes no effort to move.

“Oh sorry, I took your spot,” he explains, shrugging his shoulders as though there’s nothing he can do about it. And George is ready to just get over it and move to sit somewhere else, but before he can Dream is raising a hand and pointing towards the space beside him. “Don’t worry about it though, there’s still room right there.”

George shoots a glance at Sapnap. He gets nothing of substance in return. “Okay.”

With his arms in front of his chest, George makes his way over to the seat. It’s nothing romantic, nothing stressful or scary, but for some reason George can’t help but think it’s a bit too flashy to be doing in front of Sapnap, especially since Dream is giving him the same blackened look that he had in the library, practically inviting George into his lap with a small but warm gaze.

Neither of them say anything, Sapnap doesn’t either.

He sits down at the complete opposite end of the couch, sitting as far away from Dream as he possibly can. And George knows that he’s vowed to do something big and confident at some point but right now it all feels like far too much and George has no idea what he was even thinking.

Nerves come in strong like waves, chaotic and disorderly, and a shudder wracks through his frame when George’s own thoughts get the best of him.

“Are you cold?” Dream asks, head tilted to one side as though he doesn’t know that George’s condition will only continue if he keeps looking at him like that. “Because I can turn off the AC if you are?”

“I’m fine,” George dismisses, shaking his head. A small smile can find its way onto his lips despite it all. “Thank you though.”

Dream nods, his grin flashing sharp canines that George wants to prick his finger on, and he realises he might start staring quick enough to glance away and gesture for Sapnap to put another movie on as a distraction.

Thankfully, Sapnap can take the hint. He moves to grab the remote and find something he knows the two of them will like (or at the very least, he will), and even if Dream is still staring at George out of the corner of his eye, George knows that right now, at this second, feeding into it wouldn’t be the smartest idea.

“What have you guys been doing?” Dream asks eventually, curiosity mixing tone with honey.

“Nothing much,” Sapnap disregards. He makes sure he’s comfortable, the corners of his lips tugging up when he looks at George and then Dream. “How long are you going to be here?”

“Well I’m not going back out,” Dream says, “I think I’ll just hang with you guys.” A question sits on his lips, eyes narrowed when he directs the gaze to George. “If that’s okay with you?”

Perhaps George is too mouldable, too weak to speak up even though he probably should, and he can trick himself into saying it's a newfound confidence that mutters, "Yeah," and then drops off before pushing the words directly towards a person who he shouldn't. "That's okay."

Dream smiles, wide and chipper and far too untroubled for the situation at hand, and George wants to hate it but he finds himself smiling back, relaxing slightly as he brings his feet up to rest on the seat too, not getting too close but definitely closing the stellar distance that had been between them.

"Yeah," Sapnap murmurs. "Do what you want."

Dream hums, shuffling around a bit where he sits, and the shirt he's wearing is tight and black and pressing into his arms so when he pulls down on the collar to make sure everything is still in place, George has to try and not let his mouth hang open. Under his eyes is the smear of eyeliner, nothing refined or winged, just black pressed onto his waterline and then smudged so it can't look too neat, and on most people it would just look messy or ill-done, but on Dream it manages to work.

He's attractive, every time that George looks at him he has that same realisation, and it doesn't help that the circular snake bites have been replaced with sharper ones, small spiked ends matching the necklace that Dream wears tight around his neck.

It's a new addition for sure, but it certainly isn't unwelcome.

But one thing that stands out more than others is the lack of red on Dream's neck. The places that are usually lined with berry purple and the bite of sharp, sharp teeth seem dulled—more muted than normal. The skin isn't bare of course, hickeys take time to heal and with all of the action that Dream gets it'd be unreasonable to think that one day he'll just be completely one note, but it's still odd to see.

Certain bites have faded more than others, some still look fresh, but all are at least a few days old, definitely not the same type that Dream has been wearing for every other day that George has seen him.

And when Dream stretches to one side, angling his chin upwards and allowing his neck to stretch and for a clean slope to grow with only his Adam's apple jutting out, George can't help but inspect the skin that he sees. His gaze trails up, over the lightly painted bumps and past translucent swatches, stopping only when it lands back on two perfectly pink lips.

George watches them as though they're candy. He tastes sherbet on his tongue when he presses it against the backs of ivory teeth, and in his lap his fingers are starting to loop together and hook around themselves as some sort of anchor, keeping him centred as he runs his eyes over everything he can.

George realises he's staring a minute too late. In spite of his best efforts he's looking directly at Dream with the other staring straight back, and at least George has shame, because Dream is staring with his bottom lip being dragged between his teeth and a darkened red lust swirling around in usually chrome irises.

The movie that Sapnap chose is still playing, glaring brightness at the two of them, and at this point all of the lights are off and the blinds are shut, so the only way that George can really make out the other's face is when colour glares over and drags away the shadows.

"Hey," Dream smiles, introducing himself as though it's the first time he's done so. "You're not paying attention."

“I guess not,” George shrug backs, whispering. “I don’t know if I’m in the movie mood.”

Entertaining the enemy is a flaw that George is addicted to.

“What kind of a mood *are* you in?” Dream asks, curious.

They're both being quiet, having a conversation in hushed whispers as the TV plays in the background, and over on the other couch Sapnap is watching the screen without fault, obviously not wanting a conversation next to him. But it's a simple interaction, few small words having passed with more to surely come, and it still lets a bubble grow and pop in repeat under George's skin.

“I don’t know,” he mumbles, lying. Because George is in the mood for trouble, the kind of trouble that he can only get from screwing around with someone that he shouldn't and inhaling red fumes that act as hallucinogenics, but he lies because it's a scary, awful thought and Sapnap is right there to witness it all. “Maybe I'm just hungry or something.”

Another pause, lasting longer this time as Dream's eyebrows furrow in thought, an idea flashing so obviously through his mind before it tumbles softly from his lips. “I could make you something to eat if you want.”

George doesn't mean to but the scornful look on his face comes quickly and does nothing to show indifference. He raises an eyebrow, trying not to seem too rude about it, but in all reality there's no possible way that Dream of all people knows how to cook.

Dream must see the look, because he gasps in fake shock, keeping his voice low enough for only George to hear it when he scoffs out, “What? I know my way around a kitchen.”

“Sure you do,” George jokes, barely even realising he's doing it.

“No c'mon, don't look at me like that,” Dream groans, giving George a look that tells him he's full of surprises, and although George is sure of that, he can't peg Dream for the type to prepare a three course meal each Sunday for his family. And Dream can see that disbelief, in fact he laughs carefully, lips curling into a cocky smirk that George doesn't know if he hates. “Just tell me what you want and I'll cook it, promise it'll be nice.”

“You..?” George jeers, pink dripping from his words even though they should bite. “...Cook *me* a meal?”

Dream nods to say the suggestion isn't completely ridiculous, and judging a book by it's cover is never a nice thing to do—George should know that—but when it comes to Dream, it's all he seems to know.

Out of pure habit, George turns his head slightly, letting umber eyes run over to watch Sapnap and the way he sits so engrossed in a screen while a faux-platonic act of affection happens right next to him. And it's made worse by the fact that they've established they're flirting, they both know the other is attractive, so trying to brush it off as platonic would just be a lie, especially when Dream's eyes go wide with his pleading and drag George in further.

Even if he hasn't asked again verbally, he seems too eager to want to make something for George, but Dream's confidence is charming especially because George isn't exactly used to it, and when he's getting the puppy dog eyes from an unequivocally attractive guy, who is George to say no?

“Fine,” George huffs, putting on the annoyed look even if the feeling in his stomach twists and turns and paints him blue with apprehensive nerves. He spends a moment going over what he can

ask for, debating on pushing it too far to see if Dream is bluffing, or giving him something easy to fuel his ego and make him like George just a tad more.

And in the end George ends up shrugging and looking Dream directly in the eye, pretending his own body isn't eating away at himself when he says, "I want steak and chips." He pauses. "But you have to peel the potatoes yourself, no cutting corners."

"That's easy," Dream dismisses, batting his hand to show off chipped black nails and the same dark rings that George hasn't been able to forget. "You couldn't even come up with a challenge."

"It's easy, oh it's *easy* is it?" George scoffs, almost forgetting they need to keep their volume at a low. "There's no way you don't burn the house down."

Dream's smile is natural, boyish and brash with a small laugh slipping through his teeth. "You're an idiot."

"Says you."

Few seconds pass while Dream stands up, him winking before Sapnap can turn to capture the full scene, and George wants to say that it doesn't make him blush, but it'd be a lie. Unfazed, Dream makes sure to tug on his pants, pulling them up slightly so everything's in place when he stands, and George has to look at the ceiling to avoid seeing something he shouldn't want to.

Dream's footsteps don't seem too weighted—he walks with an ease that George wishes he could possess, and although his steps are slow they still have meaning, almost as though he planned out exactly where to place each foot before taking a singular step.

The movie still plays in the background, Dream dipping his head down to speak into George's ear with clear honey and a gravelly tone.

"I'm going to cook the best meal you've ever had, pretty boy."

It's a chide, something cocky and dangerous and not usually interpreted as flirting even if there's pet name thrown onto the back, but George reacts as though he's just been told the sweetest thing possible—with red flushes and sherbet hues, cranberry smiles under the darker freckles on his face.

Thankfully the lighting should be too dark for anyone to really see what's going on, so George hopes that Dream can't see the way his face burns red, but with crushes the worst imaginable always seems to become the possible.

"Go on then," George whispers, broken.

Dream must take it as a cue to leave, because before George can stop him, he's leaning up fully and dragging down his shirt where it had drifted up his midriff, blocking off a small sliver of skin that George eyes before being laughed off with a knowing voice.

The moment can't last forever though. Soon enough, Sapnap's voice is wreaking havoc in George's mind, his tone sounding slightly put off when he talks—all unavoidable and somewhat confused.

"What're you doing?"

"I'm making our guest something to eat," Dream explains, huffing with false annoyance as he rounds the counter and makes direct eye contact with his brother. "You should really treat him better Sapnap, at this rate he'll never come back."

Somehow, Sapnap takes that as a decent answer. He glances at George with pure amber in his eyes, double checking to see if the story is true. And George nods, even if he wants to blurt out all of his secrets so he doesn't have to start actually lying to Sapnap in the future.

"Will you make me something too?" Sapnap asks, glancing back towards Dream.

Just to get a better view of their conversation, George shifts slightly, making sure he can see Dream from his position on the couch. And it's another one of the times that George is glad that Sapnap's house is mainly open, because then he can spend his time admiring the small things that Dream keeps on doing.

Hot red blossoms over the heights of George's cheeks, a small tremble to his lip when Dream's head drops down and his hair falls in front of his eyes, swaying when he shakes his head with thunderous volume.

"No," Dream refuses, half a laugh running pink from his lips. "You can find something for yourself."

"How is that fair?" Sapnap complains, George laughing at the affronted expression. And out of the corner of his eye he can see Dream's gaze flick to him, studying his smile and the bruising of his lips when he pushes them together and does his best to not say anything stupid.

"It's not—get over it." Dream turns to George with pathetic indifference. Unfazed, unmoving. "Now, how do you want your steak cooked, Georgie?"

George's contact isn't as discrete. He's far more on display, with more need to be cautious even though he isn't, and now that Sapnap's eyes are on him, he pulls false confidence out to make the whole interaction feel less tense—drag both him and Dream into a safer zone.

"Medium."

"Wow George, ever heard of manners?" Sapnap asks. He's joking, light tone blurring the lines to try and make George feel as though what he's doing isn't wrong.

Pathetically, George does his best to return that flared energy. Orange plumes and small dots of colour that serve to make tension dissipate, ruin suspense with a flat ending that stops everything bad from happening, even if it's inevitable. "Shut up Sapnap."

Dream laughs. His hands are moving to open the fridge, grabbing items and placing them on the counter in front of him, and George would be lying if he said his gaze didn't dip down at least once. One of the rings on Dream's fingers is black, curved at the edges and wrapping tight around the digit, and George is staring with unrefined lust simply because Dream is making it easy.

"One medium steak, coming right up."

Eyes burn holes into George's neck, movie playing patterns with loud crashes in the background, and George's neck stays craned to watch Dream work the whole time. He peels potatoes, drops seasoning on the meat and turns to wash things up as he goes, and as much as George wants to say he's doing a bad job, he's not.

Dream seems to know what he's doing when he grabs a tray from one of the shelves, scraping things off of a chopping board and onto it to place in a heated oven. It's a small job, something still impressive and slightly attractive, so George watches each movement as though there are strawberry lenses in front of his eyes.

George shivers. He watches Dream's hands rub over the meat before he goes to cook it, shifting his whole body so he can see everything better, and his legs are curled up next to his chest, shielding half of his body so Sapnap can't see the way he falters.

The light above the stove has been flicked on, small under-lights casting shadows over the patches of skin on Dream's arms, and George's eyes follow where tendons flash and veins jut out with lime compassion.

Attraction is at the forefront of his mind, overpoweringly strong and making things fuzzy, but at the midst of it all there's a small inkling that considers the other real possibilities that Dream brings—the wit and the smile and the urge to prove himself right when George offers a teasing phrase. And it's still only a few conversations, it's not enough for George to be completely and utterly fucked, but it's a crush nonetheless and George is feeding into it far too much for it to be healthy.

The sizzle of a pan hides behind the TV's noise, pleasant aroma engulfing homely pine and fresh linen. And George can go hazy and dulcet as he watches and imagines that it's just him here watching Dream make him a meal on different terms, being more than friends or at least able to say the way they feel without any fear.

Eventually Dream finishes what he's doing. He pushes everything onto a rounded plate, gripping the edge tight as he flicks the lights back off and grabs the cutlery so he can pass it over to George. The language of assertion is unclear; Dream makes himself known by popping up behind George and leaning down to push the plate into his hands, letting their thumbs brush together and unblemished skin meet calloused fingertips, and George accepts with a small smile, making sure there's enough room for Dream to sit back down where he was.

George's knees push together and angle towards the inside of the couch, scraping against pillows as baggy material pools around his thighs and drowns his trembling limbs. He rests the plate on the dip between his lap and his leg, cornered off from the open edge of the room so he can look directly at the problem in front of him and slip the cutlery between his fingers.

Dream is looking at him with adoration and George knows it. He's not stupid, he can see the way Dream stares at fallen strands of hair and watches George's lips before he's even taken a bite, and he's dragging things out by scraping the fork against the plate, holding his knife with a weak, wavering grip.

His tongue darts out to wet his lower lip, darkness in Dream's eyes and on his jaw when George takes a piece and brings it to his mouth, clamping his lips down around his fork and dragging the metal out with too much hesitation and not enough discretion. His cheeks can hollow around the item, leave the fork slick with saliva and cold with clouded metal.

When George chews he tilts his head to one side, looking up at nothingness because he knows that Dream can see it. The swatches of pink are milky in his vision, encrusted ruby and glittering diamond flashing across in sparks, and Dream's aventurine eyes can flicker over his expression and grow with desire as George's tongue pokes back out to clean the corner of his mouth.

Astonishingly, the food is good. It's well cooked and flavourful, and George can't help but go for a second bite just because the taste is something he hadn't imagined before.

Eagerly awaiting a response, Dream leans forwards slightly, closing distance even if it's not by much, and George thinks he might become fluent in that body language because Dream is easy to read and George wouldn't mind picking up something new.

"This is," George pauses. "Not awful."



Dream scoffs. “Come on,” he drags, body forward while his head tilts back so he can look up and meet his eyes. “You can say it’s nice George.”

“It’s not,” George lies, shaking his head as though he’s affronted, and Dream raises his arms to claim shock before bringing his hands back down with one finding its way to land clumsily on the end of George’s knee.

The touch is light, slightly cautious and George doesn’t know if he should brush it off or let Dream make the advances he shouldn’t. But it’s warm and it’s slightly comforting, and George can get lost in the feeling of someone by his side when Dream’s thumb takes to rubbing small circles against clothed skin to make him relax.

Their eyes meet for a second, George watching the veins on Dream’s hand shift and then repose, and it’s not the time to be shy—he should know that it’s too late to be timorous—but George can feel the butterflies flutter around in his stomach nonetheless, a sure-fire way to know his own fear.

“Liar,” Dream bites, no malice behind the words.

“I’m not lying,” George says, “Your cooking is awful and I hate it.”

The joke in his tone is obvious—easy for Dream to pick up on and laugh with, a small chuckle dancing purple and yellow in the air around. Dream raises an eyebrow, watching George take another bite.

“Why are you still eating then?”.

George shrugs. “Because I’m hungry.”

He gets an eye roll in response, Dream doubting him with close proximity. And the hand on George’s leg squeezes a little tighter, one small motion that makes George turn a little more and smile with his teeth on his bottom lip (a stolen move, but one that proves effective anyway).

“Tell me it’s good,” Dream presses, wearing a grin that makes George beam too. His tone is light and doesn’t hold enough force for it to be a real wish, so George holds a tight expression and shakes his head, trying not to giggle when Dream pretends to frown and whines out an imperfect, “*Tell me.*”

Dream’s piercings get even more prominent when he draws closer, chest hovering over George’s legs as he tries to lean forward and sneak something off of the plate, and George lifts his knees to try and push Dream back, but the way he’s trying not to laugh makes his efforts look pitiful.

“No, go away,” George splutters.

Dream doesn’t though, he keeps on George and tries not to let the plate spill while they fight over it, laughing a rushed, “*No,*” when George almost knocks him onto the floor and grapples for some sort of advantage. The ground can rumble around their frames, laughs transitioning from something quiet and hushed to something more boisterous.

Dream is strong, George can tell just by the way he holds himself, but thankfully he doesn’t put too much pressure on trying to actually win anything, using weak strength and playful touches to keep them together.

It seems as though George is the only one trying to hold back, because Dream is getting closer and George isn’t doing anything to stop it. The small necklace that Dream is wearing hangs down a fraction above George’s body, their position making it so that George could sit up and drag the

other down by the spiked chain if he really wanted to.

And his hands reach up for a moment, stilling in the air with watercolour red and blemished orange, but before they can make a definite move they stop, hanging still in time as Dream sits on his knees in front.

The pause is taken as an opportunity, Dream dipping forward to grab the fork and stab something with ease before bringing it up to his lips, tasting George's tongue and making unwavering eye contact as he does so. Everything around them feels quiet, like a drowned out world and perfect oblivion.

It's a loud clatter, the sound of a fork dropping back down onto the plate, and George leans over to place it on the middle table so that he doesn't have to watch the display again. Dream's lips look pinker under the shadow, cranberry red blooming when his teeth dig in, and George wants to gasp and press closer, but he doesn't do it—he has class.

"I liked it," Dream says eventually, hands just above George's knees. The honey in his tone feels like melted sugar and perfect spring, like George should let himself be lulled by the timbre and scratch sparks from his own voice to match.

Dream's head angles down. Dirty blond shields dark eyes from view, and George may be cautious but he can still feel his hips draw closer, and closer and...

Expected rubato.

There's a cough from beside them, a harsh, biting cough that drags George out of heaven and sinks him into the depths of hell, drowning him in fire and anger and terror, and all he can do is stare out, wide eyed and shell-shocked as Sapnap raises an eyebrow and makes his questioning obvious.

"What are you guys doing?" Sapnap asks, looking uncomfortable in greens as the ugly shade lines the edge of his brow.

"Nothing," George flushes, almost too quick to be believable. And if George looks embarrassed then Dream looks content, because he's barely moved from their compromising position and is moreso looking towards his brother with a challenging expression, almost as though he's daring him to say something out of place.

"Right," Sapnap mutters, gaze flicking from George to Dream and then back again. "Can I talk to you in my room George? It'll only take a second."

"Uh." George glances to the side. "Okay."

He doesn't pay another glance to Dream, in fact he pointedly ignores him in favour of heating up and letting his shoulders tremble, and George doesn't quite know what to do or how to react so all he does is stand and wait for Sapnap to do the same.

Guilt wraps though his frame like an additive, it's overpowering and too strong, and George hates the feeling. But the disappointment on Sapnap's face is the real thing that makes him tremble. They walk in partial silence, Sapnap's confusion evident in the air too. And when they push into Sapnap's rooms George can still see his jeans lying on the ground, a bleeding reminder of betrayal.

"What the fuck was that?" Sapnap spits, not even closing the door fully before he starts his scathing.

Playing dumb seems to be the only option. "What do you mean?"

He keeps his tone innocent, wide-eyed and pleading even though he knows exactly what he's being accused of, and George knew this was a bad idea, he knew he shouldn't have messed with things he can't undo, but he was being confident and making dumb choices, there's no way that he should have to stop that now that he's been found out.

"You were flirting with my brother dude," Sapnap exclaims, angry and broken, and George can hear his begging even though he wishes he can't. "What the fuck?"

"I wasn't!" George lies. Because lying is all he seems to know right now. He'll lie about not flirting with Dream, and he'll lie to himself about enjoying it, and George can understand exactly what Sapnap's problem is, but it's hard to sympathise when he's this far gone.

Sapnap's eyes hold something foreign, pink circles and red irises, and it's anger but there's so many more levels to it, something that George can never understand.

"You were," Sapnap spits. "It should be fucking obvious that you shouldn't try and get in my brothers pants, that's weird."

"That's not what was going on," George tries.

The conscience he's holding shatters; a million shards falling to the ground like glass.

"I'm not stupid," Sapnap says, exasperation thick on his brow, and he stutters out the next words, acting like it hurts even him to say. "Because if you keep acting like *that* then I'm going to have to say you can't come over anymore."

George stills. "Sapnap."

"Don't talk to me like that."

"Okay I'm sorry," George pleads, trying not to let the frustrated red tears blossom behind his eyes. "But I promise that there's nothing going on, whatever it looked like wasn't true." And it's a hypocritical sigh, a roll of the eyes that makes George feel like complete and utter shit—someone that should never be allowed to speak again because of the awful words he lets loose. "You've just got to trust me."

Sapnap's anger softens almost immediately. His expression holding something that George wishes he could recreate. He feels bad, of course he does, he's messing with a pact he'd never thought of breaking before, but it's *exciting* and George wants to chase that thrill to the end of the earth.

He's more angry at himself than anything, because Sapnap isn't being out of line when he tells George off, but he can't help but feel annoyed at the timing of it all. The rush of confidence still not having died down even if it was fake to begin with.

A sigh—quiet but weighing heavy on the back of George's mind.

"Fine," Sapnap says. He crosses his arms, his inability to read the situation formidable. "I trust you."

And ultimately, George doesn't respond, because how could he? Would he lie again, tell Sapnap there's nothing to worry about? Or would he apologise for something he's wrong for, but too stubborn to let go of? And if this is just the beginning then down the road it can only get worse, because this is a warning, something to wave George away from doing something stupid, and yet he's ignoring every possible sign.

“George I’m not being a dick, I’m just trying to put our friendship first.” There’s silence for a moment, a beat of time that passes like a bead of water trailing over glass. And the look that Sarnap wears is subdued, melted in ice and apprehension and all of the things that George has claimed for himself. His words are shaky, almost scratching the back of his throat when Sarnap finally lets them go. “I—I don’t want to lose you.”

George swallows. “I know,”

They nod in time, exasperation making George’s vision feel strained as he holds back tears—feeling sorry for himself when he should be understanding.

Sarnap’s holding a tight smile and trying not to scream, George can see it on the way his jaw trembles.

They’re tense but they can’t stop themselves. And in the end George is the one that reaches for the door to leave, plotting a quick escape when he should be apologising instead.

It’s far too late to leave so George goes back out to the living room, sensing Sarnap walking behind him as they go, and the beam that he gets from Dream’s direction only seems to make things feel worse.

“Hey,” Dream greets, watching as George goes to sit on the couch opposite him with confusion evident in his eyes.

It’d be the best decision after that, George figures, but it’s not the one he wants to make.

“What are you doing? Come sit back where you were.”

“Not a good idea,” George says. His voice is hoarse. “I’ll stay over here.”

And that’s what he does. He sits next to Sarnap as though nothing is wrong and their friendship isn’t breaking after only just fixing it, and it feels as though all of today’s events weren’t worth it because George is too selfish to really value anything he’s given.

Silence feels thunderous, it’s commanding and ruling, and the tension in the air only serves to make George feel worse—although the misplaced anger he feels burning in his chest ruins the possibility of him being smart about his next move.

In fact, it only makes his words less calculated and far more disastrous.

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Dream doesn’t strike up a conversation until Sarnap is asleep.

It’s well into the night, possibly verging on morning and throughout every hour, George hasn’t been able to drift off—the feeling gnawing at his stomach has made the thought completely unrealistic, and the end credits of another movie has been playing for a while even if George isn’t really paying attention.

Dream’s presence next to him keeps George on edge, because even if they’re on different couches, it’s still hard to see him there. At first, Dream had seemed confused by the sudden repulsion but by now he seems to have understood it, because he’s still awake and not making any moves that tell

George he's irritated too.

But nothing good lasts forever, and soon enough Dream has battled it out with his own thoughts and is beckoning George back over with a small whisper and a calling hand.

Trying to be quiet, George obliges, sparing a glance at his sleeping friend before slinking over to sit next to Dream. He should have learnt his lesson but George has always been stubborn, and if Sapnap isn't awake to see it then there's no way he can be mad.

He's in the wrong, completely at fault, and George knows that, but he doesn't care.

Or if he does, he doesn't want to think about the end result.

"I think," Dream mumbles, quiet because they have to be. "We should hang out sometime."

George is sitting next to him, their legs almost touching because he can't stop himself, and he leans back so he can feel less guarded, turning his head sideways to look straight at someone he shouldn't. "Me, you and Sapnap?"

"I was thinking just the two of us," Dream says, and realistically George knew that that would be the response but now that he's heard it, it feels more daunting.

He's considering it though, thinking of the way that he and Dream could flirt in private and just have fun even if he knows it'll break his best friend. Because if today was anything of an example then George knows that Sapnap hates the idea of them together just as much as George thought he would.

"Just us?" George questions.

He's more bold when he's being destructive, burning bridges because he doesn't like the tone he was spoken to with, and maybe in his head this is some sick form of payback because Sapnap is trying to police his love life, but honestly George knows that's not what this is, because he's being petty and unjust, and so so awful, but it's fun and Dream makes him feel wanted.

"Yeah." Pointed snake bites move with the words, George's eyes following them perfectly.

And even if they're both sitting, Dream manages to hover slightly taller and above so that George's neck has to tilt up so he can see him properly. George doesn't say anything though. He holds back and bites his tongue while he spares a glance towards Sapnap and watches the rise and fall of his chest as he sleeps. Innocent and trusting, everything that George pretends he is.

Dream must notice the gaze. "He's asleep, you can say you want to."

Unfortunately, George knows that.

"It'd be a bad idea."

Betrayal is red; it's yellow swirls and dotted imperfection, and the crimson that hangs from George's grip is so horrifically intentional that he almost feels wrong, almost feels cautious. But Dream's charm can get the best of him. He's pretty and he's confident and he's everything that George longs for, and he should be unattainable but he isn't, so one bad thing can't make George stay away.

"You're right, but I'm a bad influence," Dream drawls, not smug but cocky, like this is some life changing opportunity that George would be missing out on if he said no. "Do something with me."

Black gates open in invitation, moonlight on the arch of Dream's brow and gliding over slender features to make him even more attractive, and George can't resist no matter the ropes on his wrists that try to drag him back and keep him in reality because Dream is looking at him like he holds the world, and George knows that he could if he really tried.

"What would we even do?"

Dream smiles as he speaks, planning out a pomegranate scented answer that's undoubtedly been rehearsed a thousand times. "Well I could take you out, we could watch a movie, grab a meal, maybe come back here after?"

It elicits a giggle from George, a feeble hand being used to slap Dream's chest lightly and tell him to fuck off without the malice. Thankfully, Dream knows that though. He breathes heavy out of his nose, not laughing loud enough to wake Sapnap, and George is glad that he's not parading them about, because honestly, George doesn't know if he could handle that right now, if ever.

"I'm kidding about that last part," Dream clarifies, looking at George to make sure it's understood.

There's the crashing of rain from far away, a cold house getting colder as they sit in the dark, unscathed.

"Sapnap wouldn't like it," George offers, although right now he knows that that wouldn't stop him.

"Sapnap doesn't like a lot of things."

It feels like a familiar line, almost as though Dream can read George's thoughts and see every dirty thing he's ever considered—see the atrocities from late nights and the way he touches himself in the dark as though it'd burn him in sunlight.

"He's my best friend," George whispers.

"That's what makes it exciting, right?"

Dream is touching him, their shoulders are pressed together through fabric and George wants to lean forwards and press their foreheads together. He can see the darkness in Dream's eyes, they're staring at each other with heads resting against the back of the couch as they slump and struggle to get closer, hot breaths fanning across each other's face even though they aren't close enough to let their lips brush.

"If I say yes you have to promise not to tell him," George pleads, desperate but staying quiet nonetheless. "He can't know."

Dream barely even hesitates. "I promise."

He surges closer, willing to close the gap but George turns his head, because even if he's taking up offers and accepting dates, kissing when they're right next to Sapnap would be a new level of low. It'd be unforgivable.

Mercy is still on Dream's features, slack jaw and viridian eyes so expressive that George can't quite give up. It's the crack of knuckles, tight black shirt keeping George's attention, and lust is bleeding into more, and George is barely keeping his hands to himself, so he's glad that someone else can at least see his effort.

Dream attempts to smile. "It's a date," he whispers, warm. "I'll text you the details tomorrow."

The nod that George gives is weak, but Dream doesn't leave just yet.

"Can I steal a kiss for now?" He asks, being more daring than George ever has. "You can say no."

And George needs to bat him away, prove to himself that he's not just some weak, pathetic guy that's falling apart at the mere possibility of ruining years of friendship, but he's not strong no matter how much he pretends to be. In the end George will always be the same scared little boy that can't tell right from wrong.

"Not on the lips," George instructs.

It's almost as though Dream can sense the tension. He smiles, toothy grin making George flush, and he lets his gaze dip from George's lips to somewhere even lower, past his stomach and landing somewhere to make George fluster. "That's perfectly fine with me."

"Shut up," George whines, sticky red saccharine on his nose. "You're an idiot."

Sapnap is still sleeping, distrust is in the air, and they're getting closer and George doesn't even know how. Dream's hand is on his knee and picks at the material of the sweatpants that George has stolen, a questioning gaze telling George that Dream is wondering why he's even wearing it. But George doesn't answer the unspoken questions, he lets Dream speak for himself.

"On the cheek then?" Dream asks, wetting his lips.

His tongue is pink, lower lip shiny and perfect, and George doesn't want to gasp but holding back the sound is difficult when Dream is looking at him as though he's an impossible wish, something to cherish and hold onto forever.

"Okay."

George gets his kiss. It's soft and it's sweet and it barely lasts for half a second, the touch light on George's cheek and disappearing before he can even process the way it feels. He sits in unforgiving silence for a moment, eyes glazed over enough for him to barely realise when Dream stands and ruffles his hair, leaving to walk away from his guest and remove himself from suspicion entirely.

"Goodnight Georgie," Dream softens, his back to the wall and his head down to hide the redness on his neck—a possible blush if George is dumb enough to hope. "If you want you can sleep in my room."

"I'll stay out here," George says.

"That's probably a good idea."

There's a hum, a soft sound reverberating off of George's throat as his voice croaks and splinters, so broken but still attempting to be in use. "Goodnight Dream."

Eventually, the body disappears, Dream leaving and unintentionally plunging George into a world of his own—one without Sapnap or Dream or anyone that can make his blood run cold and heat back up again.

Events playback on two times speed, with George wondering what got him here in the first place, why he has to ruin everything he has just for the fun of it? But regret is the last thing that George can really feel, because right now it's all about new beginnings—what could be—and when he finally falls asleep he doesn't think of the time he's spent with his friends, all he thinks about is a

new guy with dirty blond hair and a smile that makes George's inside's churn.

He's nothing if not pathetic.

Sometimes George thinks he might be a bad person.

## Chapter End Notes

woo new chapter !!

as always comments and kudos are so so appreciated and really make my day

thank you so much to flame for beta-ing this chapter for me, here's a link to their [twitter](#) and [ao3](#)

and here's my [twitter](#), I post a lot of dnf and things regarding my fics so maybe drop a follow :]

also 20k hits !! that's crazy thank you so much to everyone that's kudosed, or subbed, or left a comment, i always read them and try to respond when I can :DD

hope you enjoyed the chapter !!



## Chapter 5

### Chapter Summary

They're going on a date. *George* is actually going on a date with Sapnap's brother, and shamefully, only part of him can feel bad.

It's not just attraction, George would be dumb to think it is. It's a crush that never should have been entertained, although it's too late to think about that option now, because it has been entertained, it has been acted upon, and now all George can do is hope that Sapnap never finds out.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

At first George thinks that he's been stood up.

He waits a minute too long, elbows on the armrest of his seat and the palm of his hand pressed up against his cheek while he tries not to make the way he stares out of his window too obvious—acting as though he doesn't really care. Anyone that knows him well enough would be able to see right through the act though, notice the way that George perks up whenever a car rolls past, whether it's Dreams or not, and they'd see the dissipating blue sadness that swirls with the usual brown in his eyes before melting into nothingness.

If Sapnap were here he'd be able to see it.

It's a dumb thought, a biting one too, and even though he forces the feeling down, George can't stop it from coming back stronger just to shroud him in the dark criminality.

Sapnap doesn't know what he's doing today.

Well, no one really does. Not even George's parents know who he's actually hanging out with. For all they know he's just going to watch a movie with Sapnap and a couple others, not spend time with the guy he promised he wouldn't, and maybe get close in a way that should be daunting.

It *is* daunting though, moreso for the fact that it's wrong and George knows it's more than the fear of a bad first date, simply because he's betraying his closest friend and can't even stop himself from doing worse.

The jeans he wears feel tight around the waist, pressing red indents into the bend of his stomach and causing discomfort in the smallest of movements. George half thinks he should undo the button just so when he leans forward and presses his chin the the tops of his knees he won't be able to feel it digging into him.

But he looks nice. His hair is perfectly messy, his jumper drowns him in fabric and sits with harsh contrast against the paleness of his skin, and maybe he spent a little more time than usual in front of the mirror, trying to make sure the strawberry sherbet on his cheeks looks just right and that his posture won't betray him when he stands with his chin angled up, but he thinks it was worth it—that Dream will like it too.

Dream's not late exactly, but he's definitely not on time. And with each passing second, George can feel the dread in his stomach turn in small coils and make everything seem so much worse, but Dream wouldn't stand him up, George is foolish enough to trust him that much. So he waits, checks his phone on off moments and forces himself not to scroll through his and Dream's texts to see if he's got the wrong time. Because they *have* been texting, and George doesn't think he should open that door again.

He's home alone, sat waiting for a date that he'd planned barely days ago over a hushed call where he'd kept his smile quiet, tried not to laugh too hard in case there was someone else listening. And in reality, George still doesn't really know what they're doing, he'd asked, of course he did, he'd kept sugar in his tone when he giggled, light, and tried to get Dream to tell him everything, spill the details of where they're going and what they're doing after, but it was useless—at least now George knows that Dream can keep a secret.

The breath that George takes fills his lungs with liquid gold, it rains warmth over his skin and paints his own worries in the faded air, and just at the moment where George starts to wonder whether he could have sneaked a few extra minutes of sleep into his schedule, the same car he's seen one too many times rolls to a stop in front of the window.

Even the sight feels like betrayal.

The tires scrape red marks onto the road, bleeding orange onto the ground as the door opens up and a figure jumps out, close enough for George to see everything, but far enough for him to turn and hide in a blind spot while he waits for the knock on his door.

Don't look over-eager. That's something George has always been taught, a small piece of advice handed to him by Sapnap when they'd discussed dating problems in the past. It feels wrong to use that information now, but really, in what other scenario would George test it out.

Maybe the fact that he's going on a date with Dream hasn't really sunk in yet, because if George was more aware of the situation he handles then he'd likely be far more concerned about all of the things that could go wrong. Or maybe it's because he is nervous, because being bold is so much harder than George had thought it'd be, especially now that he's matched with a person that doesn't hold back, someone that George can't just shy away from—because Dream may not be able to read him like a book in the way that Sapnap does, but he's still Dream. And for George, that's enough to make things completely different.

For a moment, George doesn't move, he stays hidden while he waits for a knock on the door, or a chime to ring through from the doorbell, loud and sharp and enough to make George wince. But it never happens. Instead, all George gets is silence, a beat of time passing so slowly that George wonders if it's been specially designed to make a fool out of him.

But strength comes in waves. It floods normally muted senses with the illusion of green, creates strings that drag George's arms up and tug him along like he's just a puppet, a shell that fronts confidence and then sits empty with hollow pink.

The least he can do is greet Dream at the door.

The toes of George's shoes scrape against the wooden floor, scuffed sides leaving marks on the uneven boards. It's a mess he'll be chastised for later but right now it keeps him slow, stops him from running to make another mistake.

This was a bad idea, George knows that now, being alone would surely be easier than going out with a guy that can only mean the worst. But thinking that he can stop himself is even more idiotic,

because they're not dating and they're not in love—George can never afford for things to get that far—but he's still in deep. Deep enough for his mind to go foggy at the mention of the other no matter the light he sees.

A knock is the thing that drags George from his own head, it's the thing that blares like alarm bells and glares red over his mind, flashing yellow then orange before settling on the darkened colour.

George reaches for the handle as though it just might break.

He lets the door swing open, keeps the keys in his hand when he reaches for nothing and stares at the floor, forcing reliance onto his expression before looking up, face to face with a forbidden apple and wanting nothing more than to take a bite.

And Dream—Dream looks breathtaking.

It's just a black shirt, a greyed out skull on the front, and the belt on his waist holds up dark pants that sit loose on his hips, slightly baggy but tight enough for George's mind to wander. And he looks messy, slightly tired too but George doesn't think he's seen a prettier sight. Amber sits behind his eyes, shielding the pink that threatens to overtake his vision, and the swirls of black in green irises are so bright that there's no way for him not to see that they're there.

Heat floods George's senses like it's nectar, mulberry smiles only serving to make him squirm. The mocking presence ruins any semblance of control that George had faked, but there's little time to worry about how this sight would look to anyone else because Dream is here—without Sapnap—and for some pathetic reason, George is perfectly okay with that.

“Hey Georgie,” Dream smiles, charming. Maybe he's always charming though, George only chooses to notice it now.

“Hey.”

There may be silence but it's not awkward. Or if it is, it's easier to ignore than to point out. A subtle smile tugs on the edges of Dream's lips, too blatant to be ignored but far too subdued for anyone other than George to really see. One thing that could never go unnoticed though is the change of jewellery: in place of two small piercings, rounded black shapes that sit just under Dream's lip, there's a new addition, a different sort of accessory.

Dream only wears one piercing today, there could be a clip in his ear or a hook under his earlobe but that's not what George is focusing on, he's staring at the small ring that Dream wears around his lip, a curled piece of black steel—something that not only pokes out just underneath with a small ball, but also curls over the top and flicks away, slightly pointed and holding another seal over the top when it contrasts perfectly with pink saccharine and the bite of Dream's lower lip.

“Oh,” Dream smiles, his canines baring sharp as he forms the word. “Do you like it? It's new.”

“Yeah, it's cool,” George breathes.

Dream grins with cherry red, one hand coming up to weave through the ends of his hair, a slight wave guiding the movement as his rings run black against the blond strands. An apricot sky shines pink with the sun's glow, Dream managing to look it dead in the eyes without the need to squint for his own safety.

Defly, George takes a glance to the air, staring until his vision shakes and he can't see anything other than the outline in front of him.

“Are we going then?” Dream’s voice bleeds honey as it falls with blossoming scarlet. He waits for George to nod before saying, “We have places to be,” with a small wink.

“I should probably...” George points to the door, taking a bashful step forward as he pushes into Dream’s space and closes the frame behind him. “...yeah.”

A click rings out over every sound, a calm road standing behind the two as George pockets his keys and hesitates before making sure that the door is locked and turning around. Conversation is the thing that doesn’t seem to break. George looks to Dream as though he holds all of the world’s answers, pleading for a word that’ll tell him things aren’t as charged as he thinks they are.

But those words never come. Instead, Dream takes the sun between his teeth and smiles bright with the world dulling around him. George can’t help but match the grin.

“So,” Dream starts, standing close enough for his arm to brush against George’s, “Would you like to know today’s plan?”

“Of course.”

It’s George’s house but Dream is the one that guides them out, he doesn’t make the move to place a hand on the small of George’s back, but the touch almost seems to ghost there anyway, like the edge of Dream’s fingertips are burned into places they should never be.

“Well first, we’re going to see a movie,” Dream states, “And then there’s this really nice diner that serves the best burgers, so I figured we could go grab something to eat there after. *And then* if you’re feeling up to it, you could come hang out at mine for a bit, get a bit more familiar with each other.”

The way he says it sounds dirty, like the gravel in his tone is only there to make George blush, and the fact that his voice manages to dip an octave lower even though they’ve barely even started their conversation should be sinful.

“The last thing,” George says immediately, hooking onto the words with immediate haste. “That’s probably not a good idea.” His eyes are narrow, a shallow breath sinking into his lungs when a name catches onto his tongue. “Sapnap and all.”

“We could risk it,” Dream laughs, although the joke in his tone barely even feels real—more so like he’s tacking something light onto a weighted sentence.

George doesn’t read too much into it though, his mind has been messing with him all day, this is just a moment of distrust caused by his own turmoil.

Thankfully, George doesn’t need to say anything for Dream to take it back, a pomegranate smile on his lips when he turns to seize George’s attention—aventurine eyes burning holes into George’s skull with exuberant intention.

“We don’t actually have to do that,” Dream muses, reaching the car just a second before George does, the door to the passenger seat being taken in his hand and pulled open so that George can slide in and get himself seated, trying not to blush at the action as the door closes next to him and Dream rounds the other side of the vehicle.

And in that moment that George has to himself, the reality of the situation makes itself more obvious. Because Dream’s car is warm and the engine is still rolling to a stop, the seat that he’s in is comfortable enough for him to slouch, and just because he’s a bad person, George can’t stop himself from feeling happy, almost giddy at the thought that he and Dream will actually be alone

together.

They're going on a date. *George* is actually going on a date with Sapnap's brother, and shamefully, only part of him can feel bad.

It's not just attraction, George would be dumb to think it is. It's a crush that never should have been entertained, although it's too late to think about that option now, because it has been entertained, it has been acted upon, and now all George can do is hope that Sapnap never finds out.

The slam of the car door makes George jolt, his fingers fastening around the seatbelt by his shoulder as he pulls it across his chest and scans the car for somewhere to look that won't blast his reflection in Dream's peripheral. But he fails at that fairly quickly, not having the strength to keep his gaze trained firmly on a blank space as his eyes wander to the roll of material that bunches when Dream sits, the way his thighs push out and make his pants look tighter.

"You must really like staring," Dream laughs, a smirk on his lips when George blanches, the red that comes with the embarrassment finding its way back to him with the familiar strawberry hue only moments later.

"I don't know what you mean," George shrugs, lying because he's good at it.

"Yes you do." Dream's hand finds the steering wheel, black nails dipping under the light as his hand snakes around the curved edge. "It's one of the main things I noticed about you—you like to look."

"Are you saying there's something wrong with that?" George asks, hiding a blushed smile when Dream shakes his head and pulls his seat belt across his chest, fastening it tight so it digs into his skin and makes George roll his eyes. Because Dream can't pretend he doesn't know what he's doing anymore, when they're alone every movement is intentional, crafted to make George shudder and *god* does it work.

The moment shatters when the engine of the car starts to rumble, Dream's head tilting to the side as he spins the wheel in his hand and pays a fraction more attention to the dip of George's lips, doing his best to make him swoon without having to utter a single word.

He's smart, George can give him that—too attractive for his own good and dripping pink liquor with his every step, holding a glass that George can clutch onto and take feeble sips from with the hopes that one day he can stand on that same level. Maybe he's still getting carried away. Though without Sapnap, things manage to feel so much easier, simple in a way that George hates.

He shouldn't be here in Dream's car, staring at the way his fingers flex against the dashboard and wondering how they would feel wrapped around his thigh instead, whether Dream's hand could press dirty bruises into his skin and mark him violet and blemished, ruin him for anyone else that's yet to come. The thoughts can't really be stopped anymore though, at least not when there's no one next to George to keep him in line—only being a good friend but stopping every daring thought that George has ever been tempted to have.

But he understands it, maybe that's the worst part. Because Sapnap's worries aren't just fabricated, they're honest and they're raw and George knows exactly where he's coming from, because in reality, one wrong move and this could ruin everything for them, throw the friendship down the drain as though it's nothing, just because Dream can't be bothered to treat George right, or George doesn't know how to be better than a simple liar.

George's clothes don't smell like fresh linen, they aren't lined with the edge of a scent that's too

familiar to his own best friend. Instead the own swirl of washing soap lingers over the fabric, an indignant reminder of the fact that George hasn't been with his own best friend in days, hasn't answered his messages unless he felt like it.

George blames his own irresponsibility. The easiest option always being the first to be chosen, and George has never been the smartest of guys but ignoring Sapnap's texts for what feels like eons is probably one of the dumbest things he's done. It's simple though, and simplicity is key, even if George is betraying that own, original thought by sitting in a car with one of the most complex people he knows.

It's wrong. George dares to smile. But it's not as though he really knows what's going through his mind either. He just wants to feel wanted.

A laugh manages to tumble flat from his lips, hysterical and ill-made, but George can't stop it from happening. The giggle is shielded behind his hand, pale skin dusted with pink watercolour and coloured in with an orange-yellow hue. There's a moment where George tries to look at Dream, gauge a reaction that'll tell him that he's not a hindrance, that he's something.

"What's so funny?" Dream asks, amused, like George is entertaining, fun to be around.

But George dismisses the action, he listens to the roar of the engine, feels the car shake underneath him as it ghosts down the long road and attempts to cross familiar streets without making a scene. "Nothing,"

It's not dark outside, but George doesn't trust the weather. The orange in the sky will surely melt into the grey plumes that they know so well before George returns home, and the dry concrete that lines the roads won't stay so untouched for long, especially with the darkened cloud that looms in the distance, not close enough to be a threat, but definitely not going unnoticed.

Maybe it's a punishment, some sort of karma here to tell George that his day can never go too right, that things can never go perfectly. Blue will always bleed black at the end of the day, and a constellation will always dim, bright stars fading until they're nothing but a spot in the distance—barely even visible as they shine their last breaths.

"Is there a particular movie you wanted to watch?" George asks, head tilted when he focuses back in on the way Dream moves, how his arm bends when he spins the wheel and the way swatches of skin on his arm gleam pink and green as veins run across his body.

Dream hums, raspberry lips pressing together while a jet black piercing pokes out of one side, making the image indelicate as amber eyes scan over it.

"I figured we could choose when we get there," he says eventually, a tilt in his voice that shakes and tells George that there was no real plan when it came to tonight, more dumb luck and unbridled glamour that promised to coast Dream through the day.

But it's not a disappointment, for the same reason that George isn't telling Sapnap everything anymore, George doesn't mind the fact that their date hasn't been planned out perfectly. Somehow it makes it even more special.

"You don't know what we're going to watch?" George fights the urge to roll his eyes.

"No?" Dream offers, shrugging slightly even though he's still holding onto the wheel. "Maybe I was just being gentlemanly, I wanted you to pick out a movie instead so you can actually have fun."

“Right,” George scoffs, smiling pink with a raspberry tongue. His pulse races at the airiness of it all, how familiar they are without having spoken for more than half an hour at one time, but there’s no way that he can complain, especially now that there’s no real way out without hurting them all. “It’s not that you couldn’t be bothered to find us something to watch.”

“George,” Dream laughs, “I would’ve put the utmost effort into our date, however I didn’t want to make definite plans that we might’ve had to cancel because Sapnap decided he wanted to steal you away for a day or two.”

A frown fades into the open air, crumbling walls falling with the same blackened look that George gives himself in the wing mirror, biting his lip as the car swerves around a corner, no background music to dull the tension.

“Why would he do that?”

“What?” Dream scoffs, a shit-eating grin on his face. “I thought you guys were best friends, it’d be weird if you guys weren’t hanging out 24/7?”

George sighs, a honey infused tilt and a renaissance arch to the way he stretches, head turning up while his neck dips under the colour of his sweater. Dream’s breath is covered by a tremble, his hold resting on the divide between them, veins covered in earth and chrome and brushed with red powder.

“We are.”

It’s not a lie but it’s painful anyway, because one day George’s lies will have to catch up to him, he’ll be forced to face the fact that he’s not as good of a person as he pretends he is, that Sapnap gives him everything and all George does in return is lie. But they’re still something. George would still drop everything to make Sapnap happy, and he’d never lie in situations that really matter. Maybe that says more about the current events than anything else.

And Dream might have no qualms about the situation they’re in but that doesn’t mean that everyone is as easy-going as him.

“Oh come on, don’t tell me you’re not talking to Sapnap?” It’s meant as a joke but to George it’s far less funny.

Thankfully, Dream must pick up on that emotion, because when he sees that George isn’t laughing his eyes flicker over to him immediately.

“Hey,” Dream mumbles. “Don’t stress about it, everything’s going to be fine.”

Fire burns under George’s skin, a spell over his eyes that keeps him staring blankly in Dream’s direction. Because Dream is attractive and he’s sweet and he’s everything that George likes but right now it’s hard to let himself enjoy it. He watches as Dream pulls out of the parking spot, getting the car to move while they’re both seated, and it’d be a lie to say he isn’t staring at Dream’s hands the whole time.

At the end of the day, George is only human, and doing dumb things is completely normal, especially when he knows that Dream wants him to watch too. He still feels bad about it though, because even if he’s allowed to indulge, there are people he’ll still hurt along the way.

“Can we not talk about it anymore?” George asks, fingers trembling in his own grip. The air is oblivious to George’s struggle as it warms around him, fills his senses with heated exuberance when the only thing he wants to feel is guilt.

“Of course.”

The drive is slow, green tipped eyes turning towards the right side of the car where George sits every so often, making the urge to go unnoticed feel cramped and claustrophobic as it doesn't get it's wish. A moment passes and George can settle. His fingers play with the sleeve of his sweater, dragging the fabric down so it covers his knuckles and gives the impression of innocence, as though George is the one that should be pitied and not burned at the stake for the things he's considered.

But when George looks at Dream, the feeling that eats at him rolls away.

Swathes of clear skin stretch from the neckline of Dream's shirt up to his jaw where they run wild with imperfect angles. Honey glazes the back of his neck, gilded spots dotted with beauty marks as they trail over the bare edges. There's a trace of red lipstick too (although it's only in George's mind), a small reminder of the guy that Dream still is, that the person who's treating George like royalty is still bedding someone new each night—although that might not be true.

It's a strange thought, the idea that George might not understand every detail he's presented with. Because he thought he knew Dream and now he doesn't, because Dream proves George wrong and lives up to every unrealistic expectation that George has ever set for himself.

The marks are gone? George doesn't know how much he can trust it. Perhaps it's just the knowledge of his own personality that makes George question the intent of others—a distrust that other people should place on him being deflected onto the image that other people like to show, but George doesn't think it'd be too outlandish to ask where the bites have gone, question who pressed cold fingers against Dream's neck and scrubbed until the marks became nothingness, a feeble memory.

The corners of Dream's lips curl into a smile. “You've got to stop doing that.”

“Doing what?”

“Staring.”

Brightness glares in streaks through the car window, flashing over George's arms and settling on Dream's lap, a completely normal thing that somehow holds more meaning than any other thought in George's head.

“Why?” George asks, teasing because he can.

“Because I'll stare right back.”

Dream doesn't though—he keeps his eyes on the road because that's what's smart. They drive down the narrower streets, the radio barely even on and humming something slow, a song that George has heard a million times but can never be bored of. Under small breaths, Dream follows along to certain lyrics, mumbling in a voice that's too quiet for George to really hear, as though he's only speaking for himself but knows that George will lean in to hear the honeyed tone anyways.

The movie theatre is an old building. It's walls are built from stone and there's a white sign above the door—large letters that spell out long titles sitting under black frames. George doesn't think he's been there before. The place he usually goes with Sapnap is far more modern, much busier with reclining seats that they mess with a little too often, and George has never been one for the crowd or the noise, but it was with Sapnap so there was never anything to complain about.



“Come on Georgie,” Dream says, sliding into a parking spot with ease. “We should go get tickets.”

A seatbelt slides undone. Cold metal rings brush over the steering wheel before falling down onto Dream’s thigh, tracing over dark material before his hand squeezed lightly as if to say he knows that George is watching.

“We still don’t know what we’re going to see?” George points out—a question even though it’s response is obvious.

When Dream speaks, George’s mind goes hazy. He almost feels dumb, like all sense rushes out of him as soon as a pretty face starts to utter a few simple words. It brings about a feeling that George doesn’t know whether or not he hates, because it’s so stirring, it’s green and inviting but swirls with the apprehension that paints itself purple, a sure-fire way for his body to tell him that maybe not everything that’s fun is right.

“Which is exactly why we should go in now and take a look.” Dream smiles with his teeth, letting ivory push out from under saccharine, a sweet expression confused by the person it comes from.

But for some reason, it’s still lovely. George’s eyes widen when a door opens and Dream gets out, moving to do the same when the door slips from his fingers and Dream stands on the other end with an outstretched hand, a simple way to pick George up and pull him close, almost like they’re not just testing things and this is completely rehearsed.

It’s a small walk but George savours it. There’s pink clouding his vision, Dreams rose coloured lips being the only thing he knows how to appreciate, and when they move their shoulders brush, Dream’s pinkie finger managing to just barely touch George’s.

It shoots sparks through George’s veins, hot embers making him shudder slightly as he tilts his head down and hides a small smile.

They’re both quiet and it’s strange. Dream doesn’t offer a word even though he’s been so vocal before, and to George this is the first date that he’s been thinking of for weeks, so when it doesn’t go directly to plan his shoulders can’t help but slump.

And yet Dream notices the action, his eyes running down to George’s side and his lips pressing together with a rosy tint that’s smudged but still perfect.

“What’s wrong?” He asks, pressed to George’s side.

“Huh?”

“There’s something wrong,” Dream insists. “You’re being quiet.”

“I’m a quiet person.” George shrugs as though it explains everything, like Dream shouldn’t ask more.

There’s depth to Dream’s confusion, something shielded behind his eyes that George doesn’t particularly understand. Because he and Dream are on a date, they’re doing something dangerous and exciting and it’s the one thing that George has been craving since he set eyes on the other, but the eagerness has shrunk back into fear, even if that’s the very thing that George thought he had overcome.

Out of repeated habit, George looks away, forcing his gaze to the floor as Dream stands beside him, acting as though the tension in the air isn’t as bad as George makes it out to be.

“Loosen up.” Dream doesn’t look at him while he speaks, he stands tall and curls his pinkie finger around George’s before dropping it, tilting his head down to send a look that can convey everything. “We can’t have fun if you’re in your head the whole time.”

“Well how do I get out of my head?”

“How should I know?” Dream laughs under George’s prying eyes, his teeth playing with the piercing around his lip and dragging George’s attention down to the area. It only manages to distract him for a second though, eventually George realises the intention and pulls his head back up, making blackened eye contact with Dream as he tries not to crumble. “Fine.” Dream groans. “Just relax a little, no one’s going to sneak up on you and you have nothing to stress about today, everything’s fine.”

It’s not true but George wishes it was. Because every decision would surely be that much easier if Sapnap wasn’t breathing down George’s neck all of the time, only doing his job as a best friend but managing to annoy George nonetheless. And they’ve just patched up their friendship, George has just promised something empty and looked Sapnap’s choked expression dead in the eye, but for some awful reason, it’s still not enough to stop George from doing something irreversible.

He tries to voice that worry too. Hazy, George looks up and meets Dream’s gaze, almost forgetting his words when he sees the way that Dream looks at him. “But Sapnap—”

“Isn’t here,” Dream finishes, reaching out to toy with one of George’s fingers. “We are. And we’re going on a date which you are going to love.”

“You don’t know that,” George mumbles, maybe because he likes to be difficult.

But Dream is brash and can change his mind in seconds. It’s pathetic how quickly George stills, because Dream’s touch moves from one finger to two and soon he’s holding the palm of George’s hand in his, painting his skin red and causing a crimson to burn over George’s nose.

This is more bold than they’ve ever been allowed to be. They’re in public, not even hidden, but it still manages to feel like they’re a part of some dirty secret that neither will really be allowed to share. And in public opinion this might not be that bad, because Dream is attractive and he’s a flirt, so who can really blame George for swooning?

“Yes I do.” Dream doesn’t doubt his own words, maybe George is envious.

The grip he has on George’s hand remains tight. It lingers throughout everything, even when George bites his own lip in an attempt to break away, and Dream seems to know that George doesn’t really want to go anywhere, because he stays by George’s side with each passing second, and refuses to let George cower.

Nerves can ease with cool seconds, something heavy that had been sitting on George’s shoulders now having been split up into multiple mini pieces that are spread evenly over Dream’s back to allow them both to stay above rising waters.

“Now, are you looking at me?” Dream asks, finally letting himself be seen, and false annoyance is what bubbles behind his eyes because it’s the thing that makes the venom in his words sound biting but fake as he looks down at George and speaks again. “Good, I want you to pick a movie so I can get the tickets.”

“But—”

“Nope, pick something.”

There's no hint of a lie in Dream's expression, he seems adamant about not letting George pay for his own ticket and George has to pretend he doesn't find the gesture as sweet as he actually does.

"Fine," he murmurs. "Thank you Dream."

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The movie that George chooses is old. He's seen it before, surely everyone has, but it's a classic and a second viewing has never hurt anyone. If Dream has seen it before then he doesn't say anything. He keeps to George's side and pushes money towards the teen at the counter, buying them popcorn and waving his hand in dismissal when George tries to offer up what's in his wallet.

The place is oddly open. There are large hallways and few people standing by, and Dream guides George with a hand on his waist towards their screen, holding him with ease like the space on his side was moulded to perfectly fit Dream's grasp. Dream's hand is warm, his thumb runs up and down over George's side, and right now, all George wants to do is embrace it.

When they sit down, George feels like porcelain. A black screen shines white then gold, flickering images playing adverts as they both settle—the popcorn being kept in George's lap while ice drinks fog their grey holders. Dream keeps them close, his arm only unwrapping from around George when it's forced to, and George swears he can see a glimmer of green-yellow annoyance glister on the other's expression for a half-second.

"You look really nice today," Dream says once they're sat, leaning in to speak the words against George's ear. "I don't know if I've said that yet."

His tone is hushed, slightly gravelly as it drops off, and the shiver that it sends down George's spine is likely far too obvious. The compliment makes his skin burn red with pomegranate scratches, slight embarrassment making him flush so easily, but George doesn't shy away just yet. He turns to Dream with a smile, staring at dirty blond hair where it curls up and then dropping his gaze to unbidden lips—a perfectly intentional move that says more than words ever can.

"Thank you." Eye contact, guys like that. "So do you."

Dream's smile is coy. It's lopsided and it's devilish and George has already been hooked by the curved edge.

"Really?" Dream asks, ivory teeth peeking out of his mouth when he speaks, and George already knows that his next words won't be subtle, but he's more than happy to follow along. "Do you like the piercing? It's new."

It's a repeated affair, the need for validation making George resist the urge to roll his eyes. And as if to emphasise the point, Dream takes the ring between his teeth, smiling with wilted roses in his grasp and tainting everything he touches, indelicate but George doesn't think he's seen a more tantalizing sight.

"I like it."

If it's possible, Dream's smile grows wider, tongue poking through the gap between his teeth then disappearing with sugar melting on his tongue, an offhand comment of, "It'll probably be really good for making out," being said like it's nothing, as though Dream doesn't understand that his words will make George falter. (Or if he does then he doesn't care.)

“What?” George breathes, dismissive but anybody would be able to hear the mantling emotion in his tone.

“You can tug on it with your teeth,” Dream mumbles. His face is close to George’s, it almost manages to make George still. “I like that, I’m sure you’d be good at it, if you wanted to try it out.”

Words die on the tip of George’s tongue—they get caught in his throat then fight their way up but ultimately fail, leaving him to choke on his own silence and bite his own lip as to not let out a mistaken sound.

*Danger*, George’s mind screams, but he ignores it.

“You’re blushing.”

It’s true. Embarrassment is the thing that makes George giggle, it’s what spurs him on and causes his legs to press together, pointed at the knees as he shifts to find comfort and pretends that Dream’s cockish words don’t get to him. A rosy blush adorns his cheeks as Dream drags the piercing against ivory again, a small movement that he repeats until it’s engraved in the back of George’s mind.

And George tries to scoff—tell Dream that the flame he holds doesn’t grow with each passing second until it forms hope and parallels the expression George never wears. But it doesn’t work, in fact, it only serves to make George look that much more responsive.

“Shut up,” George settles on, trailing off when Dream raises an eyebrow. “The movie’s going to start soon.”

“We have time,” Dream dismisses.

George barely has a moment to breathe. He sits with his hands in his lap, too starstruck to even think about finding the space between them so he can place the palm of his hand up to the sky and offer it to be taken. Instead, he chews on his bottom lip, feeling the shadow cast dark strokes over his face and flinching when Dream gets close enough to hear his every breath.

There’s the urge to run, the feeling that they’re far too close for George to be comfortable, but he doesn’t end up running, in fact he almost tilts his head to get closer. And Dream’s breath is hot and heavy against his face, his lips almost brushing over George’s earlobes when he whispers, “Do you know what sound rocket ships make?”

A confused grin finds its way onto George’s face before he can prevent it. “What?”

His tone is hushed, voice is quiet, and the close proximity that they’re in manages to make all of the simplest interactions feel like they’re intentional, emotional. An attempt to remain neutral fails within seconds, George’s world crumbling when he turns to look Dream in the eye, the sound of adverts blaring through speakers and blurring the vision that George has held onto so preciously.

And it’s because Dream is pretty, he’s boyish like the edge of rock and brash with a lopsided smile, and there’s no way that George can take his eyes off of him, because they’re so close and it’d be so easy to just lean forward and close the gap between their lips. But despite those thoughts, George keeps his dignity, he smiles back meekly and waits for Dream to say something too, hopes for an answer that’ll calm the storm forever.

“I asked if you know what sound a rocket ship makes?” Dream smiles through the words, his tongue darting out for half a second when his eyes flicker down for a moment, not discreet in any way but George doesn’t think it was meant to be.

“I don’t,” George muses. The weight of darkness sits heavy on his shoulders, a trembling screen pushing light in small panes over the arches on Dream’s face, forging highlights out of nothing and making all of the angles look sharper, more inviting.

Dream leans back, a warm embrace pushing past a torrent of unspoken words when he flashes a dopey smile and says, “They go brrr.” He sweeps an arm around George’s body like he’s stretching, making that same stupid noise as one hand meets George’s shoulder before pressing down onto the other one, pulling him against the armrest with little to no real force.

George has to place a hand over his mouth to hide his smile. It’s stupid and it’s dumb but for reasons unbeknownst that’s exactly what George loves. He blinks a few times, ignoring the way that Dream is impatiently waiting for a reaction to his idiocy in favour of trying to accept the warmth that bubbles in his chest.

Eventually, Dream gets tired of it though, using the hand that’s on the other side of George’s shoulders to tap on his finger and drag it down to see a smile.

“You’re an idiot,” George mumbles.

“Really?” Dream chides, eyes wide and shining with something orange. “I thought that was smooth.”

The frivolity in his tone doesn’t go unnoticed. George sees the gold and finds himself letting out a snicker, almost snorting at the way in which Dream wiggles his eyebrows in an attempt to throw away tension and replace it with ease. Fire sparks in small splinters, caramel and char running under George’s nose as Dream keeps his head close and his neck tilted.

“That was the opposite of smooth,” George mumbles, rolling his eyes. “That was rough.”

The teasing glint in Dream’s eye is obvious. The way he bites his lip and nods towards George only elevates it. “It was rough?”

“Oh my god.”

“I bet you like it like that though,” Dream continues, voice no louder than a whisper as he speaks against George’s ear. “I know your type, there’s no way you don’t. You probably like to feel it for days.”

George doesn’t even know if it’s true—that’s the worst part. He hasn’t had the right time to try it out. He bites back a sound, his blush not hideable at all, and when he chokes out a small, “Shut up,” there’s no way he sounds strong.

“You’re dirty minded Georgie.” Dream lines each word with a tone that’s higher in pitch, a silkier type of honey that George can feel running through his fingertips. “It’s okay, I am too.”

Sharp teeth graze over George’s earlobe—maybe intentional but possibly not—and it takes every bone in George’s body to stop his breathing from becoming laboured.

Stomach twisting, George forces himself to keep still, trying not to bare his neck so that Dream can press his nose to the spot under his jaw and attach his lips to the skin underneath. It’s just a thought—one that runs rampant in George’s mind, because this is Dream, a guy who he’s jerked off to and seen without a shirt one too many times, and George can’t just spread his legs after any feeble touch.

No—it has to mean something.

A clash of light forces George's attention forwards, Dream's going in the same way. It's a screen of titles, the movie's name plastered over the saturated blue, and George uses the moment of silence to glance at Dream out of the corner of his eye.

"Oh look at that," he says, vanilla on the backs of his teeth. "Time to watch."

And surprisingly, Dream gives up, keeping his arm slung around George's shoulder but not pressing himself as close, giving George all of the space he needs and letting him initiate the things that he wants. It might be the most attractive quality about him, George studies, lips curled upwards as he stares blankly at the starting frames.

And maybe, just maybe, this might not go as badly as George fears.

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Somewhere along the way, Dream's hand finds its way onto George's thigh.

George isn't quite sure how it happened but he doesn't make any effort to remove it. It feels nice, strangely welcome in a sense. And George isn't sure if he'd expected Dream to be this touchy, especially on a first date, but appearances can be deceiving, and even if the touch is just part of an elaborate plan to use George's body for Dream, to George, it's so much more.

Still, the grip never roams higher.

It stays in the middle of George's thigh, just holding, and it's almost scandalous, a feeling that George wants to chase until he loses all control, but it's also innocent—intimate in a way that George craves. Somehow it makes him lightheaded, as though there's nothing his body wants more than to offer himself up for Dream to take apart, use and then hold as he paints the stars with George's colour.

A string tugs hard on George's heart, almost as if it wants to tell him that his senses aren't being stupid, that it's not just lust that makes him act this way.

It's dangerous, he shouldn't be throwing himself at a guy so quickly, but that guy likes him back and George can't pass up on every opportunity he's given.

Because why would he stop when he's having so much fun?

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The diner that Dream takes him to is retro to say the least: it's floors are red and white, seats are more like booths with small holders in the middle, and the menus look like something straight out of a movie.

Still, George loves it.

They agree to split the bill—George practically demands as much as soon as they sit down, and despite the exaggerated frown on Dream's face, he nods and lets George make himself feel less dependent.

Their table is quite nice too. Dream says it's his favourite spot in the whole diner, hidden but not far enough to be shielded from the rest of the world—a perfect place to watch people as they go about their days, come up with elaborate stories that cover their backgrounds and stick those

presumptions to them like a sign on their back.

Dream took the spot in the corner, George is facing the door, the back of a red seat covering him from most people's view anyway. He'd almost been dragged to the spot, Dream grabbing onto his hand and tugging him out of the car where they'd parked and then ushering George in with a smile on his face. It was almost comical, how wide the smile on Dream's lips was, and how he'd laughed when George had almost tripped and had to stable himself by clutching onto Dream's side, but even if the sight is a little laughable, George doesn't think he could wish for a more perfect moment.

The movie was good too. Dream had rambled a little in the car as he told George his favourite moments, and neither of them mentioned the proximity in which they sat, but George doesn't think that either have forgotten.

Dream's far more charming than George first thought as well, because sure, George had found him hypnotizing, but being here, like this, George can see a completely new side of him—one that doesn't feel the need to rush every moment they have and leave George a completely flustered mess at every change, one that's perfect in a myriad of different ways.

That's not to say that Dream isn't attractive though, because he definitely is. His shirt is slightly loose and it gapes around his neck, making the stretch of porcelain skin that flashes each time he stretches even more drawing, and there's a thin bracelet on his wrist that George hadn't noticed earlier because of the way he'd been staring at metal rings instead.

One thing that caught George's attention too, is the way that Dream plays with those bands. He loops them around his fingers, twists them slightly and makes sure to keep it in George's peripheral at all times, just because every time he moves something new flexes and flashes pink to make George hazy.

And to make things harder, now that George is sitting directly across from Dream, the taller has decided that it's the perfect time to darken his gaze, make it that much more intense as he hangs off of every word that George speaks, listening so intently while pinning George back against his seat with cherry frustration.

Idle talk helps a conversation roll by, no pauses or awkward beats stifling the moment, and George runs his finger over the menu while he decides on what to pick, listening to the suggestions being thrown at him and pulling a face when they land on something that doesn't sound nice.

A waitress interrupts them at some point, George doesn't really know how long they've been talking, just that his crush might only be getting worse.

"Can I get you guys drinks?" She asks, standing by the side of their table with a pencil in hand, a name-tag that reads something short pinned to her chest.

Tearing his eyes away from Dream, George speaks first. "I'll have a coke."

The scratch of a pencil against paper echoes in the air, the bright lights that shine down from above brightening up the page against the dark sky that's settled outside.

Dream's gaze never shakes though, even when he's saying his order, his attention is so firmly trained on George, almost as if he thinks that if he looks away then he might disappear. "Vanilla milkshake, large please."

"Okay, and are you guys eating too?"

“Yeah I’ll get the classic cheeseburger,” Dream mumbles, maybe not polite but he makes up for it with his charm.

“You want sides with that?”

Dream shakes his head. “Nah.”

“And for you, love?” The girl turns to her side, two pairs of eyes now on George, and with all the excess attention he thinks he might break.

“I’ll have the same,” George chirps. He can feel a hand reach forward to press calloused fingertips against his own slender ones, a faltering thing, the action so light that George could almost believe he imagined it. “But with fries, please.”

The waitress nods, noting each word before spinning on her heel and stalking away, leaving George alone with the guy that’s captured his heart once again. He can hardly feel hungry when there’s already strawberry on his tongue, sickly sweet and flooding his senses in a way that he hasn’t felt before, but he needs the energy, because being with Dream definitely isn’t draining but it’s new and George can’t help but hope that their night won’t be over just yet.

“God, I think it’s going to rain later,” George says, more to himself than anything as he stares out of the window, noting the cars that start to pull into the lot out front. Darkness casts its shadow over each and every one of them, leaving Dream’s own car to stay hidden out in the mess, undetectable.

“Check again,” Dream says. “It’s already starting.”

And he’s right, small dots of water have managed to stick to the window they both sit against, trailing down and leaving small streaks to get covered up by others, a clouded tangle that he wants to reach forward and trace with the tip of his nail.

“Fuck,” George mumbles. He watches Dream fiddle with the fork that’s on his left, not making a comment about how the chipped black polish on his nails looks good next to silver. “I knew we shouldn’t have parked so far away.”

“We?” Dream scoffs, teeth showing when he gives an amused smile, orange and jovial. “I’m the one that drove us here.” He pauses, narrowing his eyes for a moment before tacking on, “And it’s not even far.”

*It is far.*

Each word feels like another step that’s being made, a footstep pressed into snow and left there as a small reminder of what’s been, and George can feel himself glow at the thought of them staying there forever.

“I’m the one you’re courting,” George pokes, keeping his tone afloat and drowning in sugar, just so the dramatic eye roll he presents won’t be taken too seriously. “It’s ‘we’ from now on.”

It earns a raise of an eyebrow from Dream, the fork clattering against the table when he lets go of it. “I’m courting you, am I?”

“Well I’d hope so?” A sudden wave of self-consciousness washes over him, alarmingly strong. “Unless you want this to be a one time thing.”

The feeling bubbles away when Dream raises a hand to shake him off, wiping away acrylic grey



and replacing it with the softest shade of pink.

“No,” he says. “No, I’d like to do this again.”

And George doesn’t feel the need to answer. He stares out of the window for a moment while Dream talks to him, spilling facts about his life as though they’re trivia and allowing George to ask questions when he needs to, telling him anything he asks and barely skipping a detail.

It’s easy like that, George doesn’t feel strained to make something happen, and he can barely believe that he almost let himself miss out on an opportunity like this out of false obligation.

The food looks nice too.

Two large plates are set down in front of each of them, thanks being waved to the waitress and smiles being shared in every direction. It’s classic, that’s for sure, and eating takes the two of them a while so the conversation never really slows, in fact it’s incomparable, andante.

The light laughs that George lets out are new too, almost delicate—they’re only ruined by the false harsh words that he spits.

“Hey,” he grumbles, swatting Dream away from his place. “Hands off.”

Dream doesn’t listen though, he still leans forward to swipe a few of the fries off of George’s plate, grinning when he eats them because he knows that there’s no real way for George to retaliate.

“But I want fries,” he pouts.

“Then you should have ordered them.”

The face that Dream makes is laughable. “But I want *your* fries, not my own.”

“That’s not my problem.” George goes to shrug before a hand reaches out again. “Hey!” he yelps, probably too loud for the quiet of the diner. “*Dream.*”

“What?” Dream questions, chewing like he’s in the right. “I’m hungry.”

“You’re an idiot.”

It makes Dream smile. “*You’re* an idiot.”

The teasing gets lighter after a while. Neither of them really want to cause a scene and at the rate in which they’re going, one would only be inevitable. It’s probably the best date that George has ever been on, albeit he’s only ever been on a few, but he likes the way that Dream speaks, the way he makes George feel comfortable with the peach in his tone and the bright cloud that surrounds him.

“Hands off,” George orders again. Dream’s nails shine black against the light tables, he’s able to see the attack coming from a mile away.

Apparently the order isn’t enough though. Dream tilts his head with a boyish grin, challenging George in one way or another. “What are you going to do about it?”

There aren’t many options that George can go with. There’s a mostly finished burger and a few of *George’s* fries on Dream’s plate, so George goes for the next best thing, (or the only other thing in sight). “I’ll steal your milkshake.”

Dream’s glare is venomous. “You wouldn’t dare.”

It's barely a fight, more of a scuffle than anything, but George manages to get the cup in his grasp and lean back with the straw between his fingers, holding it so loosely and wondering if he really wants to put his lips around the same place where Dream's have been. It's childish to think about but George can't help himself.

He presses the straw to his lips, making direct eye contact with Dream when he takes a sip and tries not to show how the coldness gets to him.

"Oh god, this is amazing," he groans—an exaggerated sound coming across as something lewd when it definitely isn't. "What?" George can see Dream staring, note the way his gaze is pointed down. "Oh my god, stop staring at my lips."

"I'm not," Dream lies.

"You are."

"They're nice lips," Dream says, defending himself despite the fact that George is the only one actually embarrassed. "It'd be nice to see them wrapped around something else though."

*"Dream."*

But Dream dismisses the outburst, cherry red on his cheeks even though there's nothing to really be awkward about. "Oh come on Georgie, you stare at my lips all the time."

The brashness of it all manages to make George choke. "You noticed that?"

"Of course I did," Dream says as though it's nothing, maybe to him it is, because surely Dream has many admirers and George is likely so far down the list that a few less than innocent glances don't really pierce the skin. "You're always like, ogling me."

Still, George feels the need to defend himself, bleeding orange and breathing fire as he spits, "It's not ogling."

"It's ogling."

George has to force his attention away before he admits to anything. It still feels easy, even when the rain crashes down against the pavement with an unparalleled force before it trickles down, forming puddles and small dips in the uneven flooring. "I can hear the rain from here," George mumbles.

Dream plays into the conversation, even if it's not exactly riveting speech. "Yeah?"

"Yeah, it's getting bad out."

"You should've brought a jacket," Dream chides, wooly even though he doesn't have a reason to be.

"I didn't think it was going to rain."

"You didn't want to check the forecast?"

"Yeah well it..." The words die on George's tongue, they melt into nothingness and dissipate into the air, fragile and choked and so horrifically broken. "Fuck."

"What is it?"

“No.” George pleads. There’s a knife twisting in his gut, that dread that he had kept hidden away for so long finally catching up with him and wreaking havoc exactly where he’d hoped it wouldn’t. “Don’t turn around, it’s Sapnap.”

It has to be Sapnap after all. He looks exactly how George knows him, standing slouched with his hands in his pockets as he talks with a few of the people next to him, not looking for anyone even though George knows that he should be.

Astonishingly, Dream doesn’t seem as surprised, even though he’s just as panicked, turning around to try and gauge a better understanding of the situation. “What is he doing here?”

And how is George meant to answer that, how is he meant to know what Sapnap is doing here because this is definitely the first time he’s heard of plans to visit this diner, and now he’s having to hide in order to remain inconspicuous. It’s probably the worst thing that could’ve happened to them and George has no idea what to do, how to escape.

He ducks lower when Sapnap turns to face his direction, almost staring right through George without ever actually locking onto him. It’s glittering and it’s awful and George really shouldn’t still be thinking about how nice Dream looks tonight when his worry is spiking like this.

“I don’t know,” he rushes out, frantic and disarrayed, vivacissimo.

“Look there’s no point in hiding, he’s going to see us eventually,” Dream reasons—an awful plan to everyone’s ears except his own.

It’s panic and it’s yellow—far too close to the comfort that George had been holding once before. Everything is wrong, it’s perfect but it shouldn’t be, and it’s funny how everything can come crashing down so fast even if George hasn’t given up quite yet.

“No, he won’t.” George states. He speaks like he’s in charge, maybe because if he puts on an act long enough then he can become it. “We can sneak out.”

“George.”

All that George can muster is a glare. “Dream.”

It manages to shut Dream up though. The complaint that had been on his tongue is replaced with a look of pity—not something that George actually wants to see but something that he has to deal with. And maybe that’s when something changes, because one second Dream is ready to give up and the next he’s following along to every dumb plan that George makes.

“How do we even sneak out?”

In all honesty, George hadn’t really thought that far. There are many options, some better than others, but Sapnap is right there, glancing around while George ducks and pretends he’s extremely invested in the drinks menu, so they don’t have too much time to weigh answers.

The suggestion that George comes up with isn’t entirely awful anyway. “We crawl and then run.”

“No way.”

Annoyance glimmers in green lips, George staring at chrome eyes and pretending he isn’t being sucked into their charm while he’s meant to be staying level. “Do you have a better option?”

“Yes actually?” Dream bites, the venom not spat directly at George but still burning him when it

lands. “We wait for him to get seated and then we just walk out.”

“No, let's just go now,” George pleads, his eyes wide because he means this, this is important and there's no way he'll let a simple date ruin everything. “He can't see me Dream.”

“I know.”

The plan is never said, in reality it's just dumb luck that carries them out of the place without being spotted, and even though they execute it perfectly, George can't help but wonder if they'd been spotted far earlier.

It's mainly running, that's the only real thing they have up their sleeves. George pulls up his hood and dashes out of the place while Dream follows close behind, grabbing onto his hand with a red urgency when they're close to the door and can spot where Sapnap is seated with a few others.

The door swings open with more force than necessary and before George can wonder if it's actually needed, he and Dream are running out as though they're never allowed back. The rain hits them like a truck, heavy and cold and sliding down their torsos and George really wishes he'd brought a coat because he almost thinks he might freeze.

It's fun though—that's the main thing.

When they run they don't particularly know where they're going, likely trying to find Dream's car without fully knowing where it is, and George thrives on the way that Dream stumbles and glances around like something's just disappeared from under his nose.

Sapnap's still back in the diner, sitting at the back of George's mind even though he's the cause of their whole situation, but right now standing with Dream and running from nothing is far more interesting. Maybe George should feel guilty, maybe he shouldn't have pushed away the guilt so easily, but what's done is done, and George won't apologise for trying to enjoy the rest of his date when Sapnap hasn't even seen them.

At some point it turns into a game of sorts, the two of them moving in a desperate attempt to be the first to find the vehicle, and neither really win because they're still holding onto each other, but George is sure that if anyone asked Dream then he'd claim the victory for himself.

George's head bangs against Dream's chest, a sigh escaping him when they fall back and stop, breathing heavily as they try to keep themselves composed. The world around them is quiet, ticking slowly and calmly as if to juxtapose the wreck that Dream and George have become. The rain falls hard against them, a simple drizzle having melded into a mess that's managed to drown their clothes and make their skin tacky with a mix of weariness and nature, and it takes a moment for them to realise that they're still there, standing outside in the dark and not fully safe yet.

George glances up, tentative. And Dream's eyes stare back at him with aventurine specks and curled wonder.

It barely takes a minute for them to break.

“Oh my god,” George gasps, falling into a laugh that fills his lungs with yellow delight. “Oh my god.”

Dream's in the same state—he's wheezing, clutching George close to his chest without even meaning to. “Fuck,” he gasps out. “That was close.”

“I thought he saw us,” George rambles. He's ignoring how close they are, if he thinks about it then

it'll become more real. "I was coming up with a story to tell him."

They share a look, eyes crinkling and mouths wide with bright smiles, and right now, if it wasn't for the fact that they're still out in the open, George would almost be tempted to lean in.

"God, my clothes are wet," Dream says; the world shatters around his haste in which to get the words out.

He's looking at George differently—it's the first thing that George picks up on.

"I can't believe you dragged me out of there," George breathes, careless. "Did you even pay?"

"I left thirty dollars on the table," Dream explains. "It'll be more than enough."

"That's not exactly a generous tip?"

"In case you didn't notice we were running from my brother, sorry if my tip wasn't the best."

Bite forces another laugh out of George, and maybe it's not a situation to be laughing at, especially when it's the exact one he's been dreading for days but right now they're free and George quite frankly couldn't care less. "God," he drones. "That was fun."

He's not sure if it's the right thing to say but he's being honest. Orange lies on his fingertips, rainwater mixing with the colour to make it drip to the floor with a slight hue, and Dream might not be able to see the shade, but it covers his hands just the same.

George still hasn't been pushed away yet. He's still standing almost on top of Dream, holding onto the shirt that he's wearing and almost being surprised by the fact that he can feel the other's chest against it.

"Yeah it was," Dream agrees, looking down at George with darkness behind his eyes and then getting distracted. "You know..." It's a pattern, one glance at the road then one towards George. "...you really surprised me George."

Out of all the words that Dream could have said, those might be the ones that George least expected. "What do you mean?"

"I just mean that you're nice to be around," Dream shrugs. "You're different."

"Yeah?"

For a moment George wonders if they're going to kiss.

It doesn't get that far though, Dream breaks it before they have the chance to get closer, and it's the most confusing thing of all because that's what Dream wants isn't it? Because if it's not just sex then the possibility of George dropping every single guard he holds up completely becomes so much more.

The piercing that Dream wears gets pulled between his teeth, inviting George to something that he's conflicted about. "We should get in the car."

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“Where are we?” George asks after a while.

They’ve been driving in partial silence, unspoken words lingering in the air but somehow not managing to drag the night down. And George feels different, like he doesn’t want to go home yet, like any time he spends with Dream will be better than anything else.

The run-in with Sapnap has his blood pumping, heart beating erratically as he thinks of the ways that they could have been caught—how disastrous things would have been if they were spotted. But they weren’t, and that’s the most addictive feeling of all.

“Nowhere special,” Dream says, slowing the car only by lifting his foot. “Just wanted to catch my thoughts before I kept driving.”

George nods, untouchable.

They’ve gotten away with a date. It was hardly a public thing but they still managed to do it—spend time with each other without breaking Sapnap’s heart completely, and a smile graces George’s lips as he thinks of the way that Dream makes him feel, all while he threads a new attachment through his heartstrings and draws dots with the excess fibre.

Silence with Sapnap is different to this.

There are eyes on the side of George’s face, trailing down from his ear to his neck and running under his sweater, following a droplet of water that he hasn’t quite managed to brush off yet. He feels like he’s on a page, a piece for people to treat like fine art and run their gaze across while George stays still in a pose of perfection. And normally that would make him feel caged, trapped even, but when he’s a model for Dream that sense of worry seems to go away.

His fingers tap against his leg, once then twice. Raspberry swirls can rush to his cheeks, very muted and barely visible, but definitely there. For a moment, George wonders if Dream even knows that he’s staring but he doesn’t want to draw too much attention to it, in fact he makes the pointed effort to glance away, staring at the abyss that lies beyond his window and wondering if he could throw something and have it disappear forever.

The fire in his veins never seems to die, acidity on his tone as he tastes berries and tries not to watch a pink lower lip get pulled between pearl white teeth, a black lip piercing snapping back into place when Dream finally lets go.

Outside, the road is long. It’s dark and it trails off into nothingness, and the only thing that suggests there’s life out there other than Dream and George is the fact that barely shining street lamps follow the path that dips around a building’s curve.

Maybe it’s curiosity. George has had a taste of danger and now he wants more. He wants excitement, fun. But no matter the reason, George turns to Dream with a proposition, wide eyed and embarrassingly eager to shake the other from his trance.

It takes more than a second though, Dream’s so stuck on George’s features that George has to pull on his arm to drag him out of it, and perhaps that wasn’t the easiest way to do things because all it really manages to do it make Dream embarrassed, a new surprise but perhaps not an unwelcome one.

“Sorry,” Dream smiles, shaking his head slightly as he looks down, chin falling while he tears his eyes away from George’s and keeps them firmly trained to the floor, almost meek-looking. “I don’t normally get all spacey, I’m usually more composed than this.”

“It’s okay.” George keeps his voice soft; tries not to stare too hard in case Dream can see the fragility behind his gaze.

The weather clouds above them, rain pouring in hard beads as they fog the window in front, cold and darkened and leaving the heating of the car to get warmer and warmer until they’re on the brink of collapsing. It feels hot when Dream looks at him—George is sure that it’s just his mind that tells him that but he can’t help but feel the burning on his skin.

He blossoms pink, holds the cordiality between his teeth. Dream smiles in response.

If they want to be home soon then they should probably get going, not sitting with slightly wet clothes and hushed smiles, doing their best not to look at each other even though it proves to make the situation worse. And George doesn’t quite know what makes him say it, but he needs something to get him out of there. He needs an excuse that’ll make everything easier.

“We should take a walk,” he blurts out, sudden.

Confusion laces Dream’s expression. “What?”

“You heard me.”

“We just ran to get into the car, why would we get out again?” Dream pulls on his shirt as if to show the way it sticks to his chest, damp and thin and George doesn’t mean to stare but he can’t *not* look at the outline that he’s presented with. “No.”

The word sounds commanding, like Dream has no plans to change his mind, but George is persuasive, he always has been, and he’s sure that batting his eyes a few times and giving Dream a look he’s never tried out, can only work in his favour. “But it’d be fun.”

“Warmth is fun too,” Dream states, cogent though he ruins that image with a lewd smile and the way he rakes his eyes over George’s body. “And I know plenty of ways for us to get our body temperatures up.”

“Shut up,” George scoffs. “It’ll be fun.”

Dream gives him a look to say he doesn’t quite understand, as though George’s request isn’t in character, as though he’s surprised by something.

“Have you never wanted to just dance in the rain?” George asks. He leans back against his seat, unbuckled and just beaming in Dream’s direction. “Just enjoy yourself.”

“I thought we’ve been having a good time all day?”

“We have, we’ve had such a good time” George ensures, rushing to clarify because this is the most fun he’s had in a while and there’s no way he’ll let Dream get the wrong idea, especially when he’s the one that’s making George so happy. “But you’re about to take me home. I just want to do one last thing.”

For a moment, just a second definitely not longer, it looks like Dream falters. Perhaps it’s because he sees the hope in George’s eyes, maybe it’s because he doesn’t know what to say. But when he does speak, he keeps his voice quiet, talking as though he doesn’t want to let George down but has to anyway. “George, I didn’t bring a jacket.”

“Neither did I.”

“Your hair looks good when it’s wet,” Dream says, a distraction technique that only works when he leans forwards and takes the slowly drying tufts on the back of George’s neck and holds his hand there, playing with the strands and watching himself do it. “It’s curly.”

George almost gives in.

“Is it?” He asks, melting into the touch. “I’ve been meaning to get a haircut for a while, that’s probably why.”

The fingers in his hair move up to brush over his jaw lightly and the look in Dream’s eyes is alien, making it seem like he’s thinking far too much to keep a filter over his mouth.

“I like it long,” he mumbles. “It suits you.”

And when his lips purse to smile, George shakes himself out of the spell. “Stop distracting me,” he whines, faking a pout. “I want to go do something”

“It’s raining,” Dream mumbles, his eyes shining with something that George can’t quite place.

“I know,” George laughs, his hand on the door as he moves to push it open, a giggle tumbling from his lips when the crash of water floods his senses and the cold evening air rushes towards him, a cool embrace that he can’t shake off. “But it’ll be exciting.”

He’s feeling bold, acting like nothing can stop him, and quite frankly, George thinks he deserves it, he thinks that he’s entitled to a little thrill. It’s cliché and it’s stupid, but George is still having a good time, closing the door of the car when he clambers out and leaves Dream to sit dumbfounded behind the wheel, staring and gorgeous like the perfect golden boy that George can never stay away from.

The heels of his shoes drop flat against the concrete ground, streetlamps glimmering with their fluorescence as they blur the world around him, keeping everything bright even though the shadows around try to null it. There’s something running through his veins, a feeling so foreign that George doesn’t even know how to react to it. His sweater is wet, it’s cold and damp but there’s no way he’s stepping out right now, not when he feels as though he’s riding the high of confidence and bashfulness and knows exactly how pretty he is.

Rain hits his face in the smallest droplets, it runs down his neck and dips under his shirt to cover his collarbones and trail down his chest too. His hair puffs out, slightly messy and barely presentable, but who cares, this is new and fun and who gives a fuck if it’s a little cliché too.

He turns to face Dream, grinning at him through the car window, and if Dream is really going to stay there and pretend that he’s incapable of letting loose, then George certainly isn’t going to stop him—his opinions just might change a little. But when George turns around he’s met with something unexpected, not a look of judgement or a look of confusion, Dream doesn’t wear anything distinguishable on his expression at all. It’s his eyes that do all the talking.

They’re wide, sparkling green with amber behind the sockets, and with the way his lips stay parted and his gaze starts to falter, George wonders if he’s done something wrong. Then it’s a flash. Dream doesn’t move straight away but his fingers tap against the dashboard in hesitation as though he’s talking himself through a thought that just won’t budge, a fleeting thing that makes everything seem difficult.

Dream is gorgeous, George thinks.

Even when he’s thinking and George’s vision is indefinite from the raindrops that catch on his



eyebrows, Dream is gorgeous. Each line on his face is perfect—some oddly placed and not all completely straight, but they work in a way that shouldn't, creating beauty in a few sharp stripes. Strawberry is etched onto the heights of his cheekbones, circling the glow that the overhead light that the car emits.

There should be a point where George looks away but he doesn't know how.

Perhaps it's just the weather. The rain carries a sense that George can't quite shake, a smile that can't be faked coming across his face when the car door pushes open and Dream steps out, his seatbelt snapping back against the car from the haste in which he'd pulled it off.

It could just be George's mind, a cruel trick that he plays on himself to see how much he can take, but for a brief moment George thinks he can see awe in the specks on Dream's cheeks, an admiration for something George doesn't understand.

The weather ruins Dream within seconds. His skin looks pale and his shirt is plastered to his chest, leaving the scope of his body to become defined and finely marked out under George's gaze. He watches Dream's arms raise, scans over the way dirty blond hair starts to droop as rain falls down over him, and he moves to make a comment but nothing actually comes out.

That is until Dream decides he's had enough.

"I can't believe you," Dream huffs, a laugh that George finds addictive bubbling from his throat as he surges forwards to grab George from where he's standing. He pulls him tight, grabs his legs and hoists him up into the air in some sort of fireman's lift, leaving George to flail against Dream's shoulder as he tries to hold onto something that'll keep him stable. "You're going to get my car so wet."

"Put me down!" George laughs, half-screaming when Dream threatens to throw him. "*Dream!* Dream stop, oh my god."

He gets spun for a moment and Dream has the unspoken permission to never let him go. The world runs pink and blue, it's bright and dazzling even with the darkest of skies, and George is so perfectly content with it all that he can't help but laugh along with the wind.

"Put me down," George repeats, loud and unabashed with his words. There could be a million people watching and he wouldn't notice, wouldn't care.

"*Put me down,*" Dream mocks.

George has to pretend he doesn't find the impression funny. "Down," he says again, laughing through his breaths. "Now."

"You're such a baby," Dream scoffs, dropping George back onto the floor with a splash. He shakes his head. "Why the hell did you drag me out here?"

"I didn't want to go home yet," George shrugs, honest, maybe for the first time in weeks.

His toes tap against the floor, dipping into rainwater where it trickles past him and causing a small tap to echo against the concrete ground. There's no real reason to stay safe, right now they're alone, George can say what he thinks. It's still dangerous, it's still different, and there's not a chance in hell that George will drop down every barrier that he's ever built, but he'll force one down at the very least, let it crumble into nothingness and then drag Dream through the rubble.

Dream's eyes are narrow, pensive. "Why not?"

“I like hanging out with you.” George shrugs like it’s nothing, a smile gracing his lips that he pretends isn’t tearing his soul apart. Because it is a real smile and that’s terrifying. Because George doesn’t fall fast and he never does things like this. Because Dream is Sapnap’s brother and Sapnap is meant to be the one person that George tells everything to.

Because George doesn’t think of himself as a good person.

Cold air sticks to his skin like asphalt, making him shiver under the fabric that covers his chest, and going out in the rain possibly wasn’t the smartest idea but they can still have fun—that’s all that George really wants. His brain moves at a million miles per hour, eyes on Dream’s face and the way the cold has brought out the red on his nose.

*He looks kissable.*

The rain makes each movement blurred but George can still see the way that Dream’s clothes hug his body, his shoulders narrow but looking taught with muscle and making his figure that much more perfect. By now Dream’s hair is stringy too, it’s wet and messy and he has to shake his head and run a hand over his eyes to clear his vision, and if George’s mouth hangs open then he doesn’t want a comment on it.

He almost feels stupid for dragging Dream out here, because now they’re just standing and wet, and it’s nothing like the movie scenes that George has been fawning over—this is far less glamorous. But even if it’s not perfect George can still act as though it is, because in his opinion, just being here is making everything worth it.

“I bet if we race to the end of the street then I’ll win,” George says, tearing apart their staring match with a few simple words.

Dream looks more confused than anything. “Oh come on now,” he mumbles, speaking so quietly that George has to lean in to hear it. “I’d destroy you.”

In response, George shoots him an unimpressed look that doubts him without having to say a thing, and thankfully Dream takes the bait.

“Shut up.”

The road is wet. It’s narrow too. Not the best conditions for a race but their date hasn’t been under the best conditions either.

“Race me then,” George pushes, hoping he can read Dream well enough for him to know that this will work. “Come on.”

“It’s raining,” Dream points out, the same excuse from earlier popping back up again, even though George has ignored it once and will likely ignore it again.

“I can tell.”

There’s no real bite to any of his words, fanged teeth stay hidden and all unsaid feelings remain unsaid, because it’s far too early to even think about where this could go but all George’s mind can do is betray him. The floor scuffs the toes of his shoes, creating messy grey marks along the top that he’ll have to try and scrub off later if he can find the effort, and George sends a look to Dream as if to ask if he’s really going to sit this one out.

The disagreement never comes. Dream keeps his status as the most exciting thing in George’s life, and even when he turns slightly to raise his arms up over his head and try to shake off the rainwater

that's collected around his collarbones, George can't help but be in awe.

"To the end of the street then?"

George nods. "There and back."

A starting line is actually a divide drawn by George's hand. He etches their memories onto the road and hopes that no car will come along to disrupt their juncture. The footsteps he leaves behind are magenta, pretty against the ground as they reflect off the streetlights and bounce into the air. The ones that Dream leaves are slightly darker, maybe violet or another shade of purple—George can't quite tell—but they're still prominent, almost as though they're meant to be telling him something.

"You're going to slip," Dream says once they're in position. Or, when *he's* in position, because his hand touches the ground and his back is bent slightly to give the illusion that he knows what he's doing whereas George is barely managing to keep himself upright.

"I won't," he assures.

The blow of a whistle is really just George making a sound that more or less replicates one, and before he knows it they're off, Dream significantly further ahead.

And George does slip. He trips over his own feet, tumbling forwards with a loud yelp so he falls straight into the arms of a tall blond with snake bites, a guy who he hasn't known for long but who he pretends he can afford to hang out with.

"Shit," George gasps, peering into the eyes of his saviour who only offers him a smug look in return. And it's at that point that George decides that this is the most hilarious situation he's ever been in—bursting into laughter as he clutches onto Dream's shirts and holds himself close to his body like they're one.

"Hey," Dream says, descending into the same laugh that's overtaken the other. "I told you you'd slip."

"I barely even did," George giggles, air in his tone even though he should be shaking in the cold.

He feels alive.

"You fell right into my arms," Dream says, spelling it out as though George doesn't know as much.

"Like a damsel in distress."

"You're so dramatic."

A golden opportunity rings in the air, Dream taking it within seconds. "And you're so pretty." His hands stay on George's sides, somehow swaying them though George can't place when that movement started.

"Dream," he flushes, shaking it off with the droplets of water that have stained his skin. "You can't just say that."

"Why?" Dream questions, and he's endearing, George can give him that. "You're one of the prettiest people that I've ever met."

"Thank you," George mumbles. He doesn't want to stretch it out anymore, he can't be bothered to fight the compliment.

“No, I mean it.” Dream insists, acting as though he doesn’t think that George believes him. “You are amazing.”

“Dream.”

“No, I want you to hear it.”

The gold behind Dream’s eyes has disappeared and been replaced with something else. It’s not the same as before, and George has found so many new expressions over the course of the evening that he doesn’t know if there’ll be any left for other days.

Dream looks at George like he worships him, confused as to why but doing it nonetheless, and George is sure that he’s seen a look similar to that in his own mirror but his was more ridden with guilt—Dream’s might be too, George hasn’t found the time to ask.

Their chests are pushed together. Dream’s breath is hot against George’s forehead, and George doesn’t really know why they haven’t pushed each other apart yet but he’s going to hang on while he can, because it may not be first date behaviour but there’s no harm in letting himself get a little lost.

“Why are you so nice to me?” He asks eventually, staring up and seeing smoke. “I don’t get it.”

For a moment, it looks as though Dream isn’t going to respond, or if he does his voice will surely be flattened by the sound of rain hitting the floor. The gears in his head seem to turn, conjuring an answer that’ll be honest but won’t tell more than George really needs to know.

“Sapnap talks about you a lot,” Dream settles on, tone conversational even though his eyes glaze over when he speaks. “He used to come home raving about how his new best friend is like the coolest guy ever, even if he can be a bit of a dick.” There’s a pause—an imperfect moment where Dream softens. “Sometimes I wonder if he’s in love with you or something.”

“He’s not,” George dismisses, because he’s not, they’re best friends.

Dream looks past him anyway, almost as if he doesn’t take on board the words that George is saying because he wants to finish his own train of thought first. “And he’d call you smart, and he’d say you’re pretty, and then he’d tell me about how much I’d love you too—even said you were in my grade.”

George knows that it’s not what Dream meant to do, but the admission only serves to make George still, because Sapnap thinks highly of him. Sapnap, the guy that George has been lying to for god knows how long, thinks of him like he’s the best person he’ll ever know.

But George has already established he’s not a good person, and his mind can only linger on certain words for a few moments before he’s moved onto the next best thing and is standing with the meekest smile on his lips. “I thought you didn’t know what grade I was in?”

To his surprise, Dream laughs. “I lied,” he confesses, shrugging like that’s not monumental news to someone like George. “I wanted to be cool.”

“I still don’t get it,” George half-lies, because it feels like he has all of the pieces but doesn’t know how to place them together. He’s holding a puzzle and all of the sections are blank.

“It doesn’t matter,” Dream mumbles, shaking his head even though he’s smiling. And all George can feel is confusion, but he’s still staring into Dream’s eyes so maybe it’s not all that bad.

“Okay.”

“Yeah,” Dream trails off, hesitation so clear when he tries not to keep anything lingering for too long. “Well that’s enough soppy shit for a first date.” He almost lets go of George’s side. George stops him from running. “I’m gonna leave a bad impression.”

“You could never,” George adds, although he isn’t too sure how much he believes it.

One of Dream’s hands comes to rest on his cheek, fire against ice. Tilting his head, George smiles. He’s pressed up into Dream’s space, not wanting to leave just yet because of how faultless it feels. Water clouds George’s vision for a second but Dream wipes it away, the same way George is sure he’d push brimming tears away from red lined eyes in a moment of intimacy.

His lips look so pink like this—when they’re directly in front of George’s face, only shielded by a black piercing that George wants to taste. He feels dirty for the thoughts in his own mind, but they’re natural and George isn’t quite sure how to stop them from forming, so instead he takes a leap of faith, hoping he’ll be caught when he falls.

“Dream,” George murmurs, tentatively. Nerves are the least of his worries, but they’re so close now that rejection is almost ruining. “Will you kiss me?”

“George.” Dream almost looks like he’s frowning. Blue lines his expression—causes him to look indistinct and almost unclear, and if there’s a sign that George has missed or a point that he’s not understood then he wants to be told now before he makes a fool of himself for good.

When George speaks there’s almost a tremble in his voice, a slight shake that makes him seem weak. The string of a violin snaps as it screeches out a painful note, one that’s out of place and irregular, desperate but not able to understand the instruments around it.

“It doesn’t have to be a proper kiss or anything, I just want to try.”

Dream’s expression tightens, a flicker of pain crashing blue across the lines of his face, mahogany ropes tying him down with something that George can’t quite see. He’s nervous, can hear his heart beating right behind his ears, but he’s pouring every ounce of trust he has into a guy that’s opening up in front of him, a guy that he barely even knows but would follow to the ends of the earth already.

“George,” Dream mutters, standing so close while he attempts to keep his tone indifferent, something that George picks up on far too easily. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

And confusion is the fuel that forces George’s laugh, his giggle bouncing with the water in the air and landing so prettily. It comes to a point where George doesn’t even know if what he’s saying is true, he can’t differentiate between his own hopeful woefulness or the fact he means it, really believes that a golden boy won’t shine bright enough to blind him. “You could never.”

Calloused fingers brush over the side of a trembling jaw, cool alabaster marked with dot-like imperfections, all being traced over by black tipped nails and cool metal. The rings on Dream’s fingers are cold, they fit snug against his skin and cause George to flinch out of pure shock, needing to give himself the time to melt into the touch until he’s pliable, dulcet.

A raindrop falls steadily down the planes of Dream’s neck, umber eyes following the sliding motion when Dream doesn’t brush it away, letting himself be drowned in honey and ice until the softness overtakes his features and his lips part, piercing black and untouched over reddened pink.

If Dream’s eyes could speak then George is sure that they’d be pleading with him, glistening like

stars and uttering words that neither really want to hear. And all it manages to do is make George blush, burn red with an embarrassment that he doesn't think he's felt before. If he leans forward then he could push his nose against Dream's, lean up on his tip-toes and place a tentative hand on his cheek, calming, but George doesn't quite know what he's doing—he's doing everything with the hope that Dream can understand his own inner monologue.

"I'm nervous," George mumbles quietly, unsure and trying not to let every crack show. "Is that normal?"

He can see Dream nod, the blur of light casting a shadow below them in the rain, painting their silhouettes with something dark—blue and black and all consuming.

The first shadow moves with little confidence, it reaches up towards the taller one, takes a shrouded hand and places it over the tufts of lighter hair, guiding a head down without seeming too commanding.

"Of course," the second shadow says, caramelised sugar burning in its tongue when it speaks, so close to the other but still seeming so far away, almost untouchable in close proximity, with jagged edges that force a perfect silhouette to keep empty space between the merge of two bodies. "It'd be a lie for me to say I don't get nervous too."

"What scares you, Dream?"

The taller shadow breathes out glass, warmth splitting in the air when the rain crashes down and blurs the casting, the road spreading into the darkness of their outline. It's fingers merge with the face of its opposite. "Kiss me."

And George obliges, he lets himself taste cherry on the front of Dream's lips, being guided by the hand on his jaw as stardust covers his eyes and makes him delirious. Dream kisses him until he's breathless, presses their lips together until the touch is bruising, the mulberry swirls making the dusted red of their lips melt like nectar and bleed gold sparks.

Dream knows exactly what he's doing—George realises that fairly quickly.

He moves with intention, pulls George's body close to his own and wraps an arm around his waist to pull him up, push George's head back and bring his own down to make each touch more desperate. It's messy—that's something that George notes too. He's kissed people before but not like this, not in the way that Dream does. Maraschino cherry runs through George's veins, a faint thought pulling at the back of his mind that makes him wonder if this is how Dream kisses everyone, if he tugs on the strings of their heart and paints pink on their collarbones as a reminder to mark them up later.

Helpless desperation is the thing that makes George simmer, his eyes squeezed shut as he tries to show Dream that he can be good enough too. Perhaps he wants to know if this is what Dream is like in bed, if he's tactless yet passionate and runs with hot fervour as he treats the person he's with like they're perfect, flawless.

George knows that the action can't last forever though.

He lets Dream pry his lips apart, his tongue running over the backs of his teeth as Dream tries to deepen the kiss.

Rain strikes the ground around them. Promises twist and fall like feathers. George can't find the effort to stop. He's selfish and he's imperfect, but it feels amazing, so why would he change?

Dream's lip piercing pushes cool metal into George's space, bringing along the overwhelming urge for George to take the edge of ivory teeth and snag the snake bite towards him, make Dream gasp out in shock or pleasure or a mix of the two. But George doesn't do it—he'll save that trick for later, when they're not out in the open, standing on a dark road with freezing bodies and wet clothes, putting on a show that anyone can see even though doing everything in secret is the smartest option.

George's arm loops around the back of Dream's neck. The inside of his elbow touches the base of his hair as his other hand cups Dream's face and keeps them together. It's pink and it's soft and it might just be the prettiest shade that George has ever seen.

The kiss slows after a while—when rain pours louder and George is sighing against Dream's lips. They loosen and George drops slowly, feeling Dream chase their connection before taking George's bottom lip between his teeth and letting it fall back.

It takes a moment for George's breathing to steady, Dream's faltering in the same way with a hitching stutter. He doesn't quite know what to say, seeing stars in dotted lines and hoping he can keep this warmth in his chest forever. Dream doesn't say much either. If anything, George thinks that he's scared, confused by the way his skin stays heated but the air around them remains cold and biting.

Recovery only takes a moment.

"That was..." George pauses. "Wow."

A smile teases on his lips. His eyes drop down to Dream's piercing, noting the bitten red around it as he closes his mouth and then opens it again, water stained skin gleaming a transparent white over a blued out hue. He looks fucked out, almost weak, like Dream can't regain control because he's too focused on the way that George breathes. And George can only feel needy.

His hands loop together, fingers touching as he stares to the side and hides the giggle that he wants to throw out.

Dream's last words burn like fire in oak-hickory forests. They crash with urgency and feed off the harsh cry that rings with mercy and blood, unforgiving tempo rushing the edges as vice grip keeps George's face close to his—a weak stare the thing that remains warm under hot embers before dying with a subtle breeze. It's nothing that George shouldn't have expected, it's red and it's blue and it's every colour that George has learned to hate, but the purple confusion that forms from the mottled swatch is the only thing that he can come to focus on.

"I don't think we should do this again."

## Chapter End Notes

comments/kudos are so so appreciated and really make my day :) <33

So,,, new chapter !!

Really hoped you enjoyed it, sorry for the wait, I had a little bit of writers block and another fic i wanted to post first, but I'm glad i could get this out ! also,, 40k hits feels kind of epic, like thank you sm to everyone that's commented and left kudos I'm glad

people actually like this lmaoo, it's a very "stereotypical" trope but I'm having fun writing it so who really cares?

Tysm to [flame](#) for beta-ing, here's a link to their twitter !! they're so cool and write fics too so check them out !

And lastly,

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## Chapter 6

### Chapter Summary

Because George's mind is back on black snakebites and a guy that doesn't really want him, and nothing that his "best friend" can do will change that.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Dude,” Sapnap groans. “What’s wrong?”

There’s a hand on George’s arm, a citrus infused smile being plastered over the corners of his lips as Sapnap sits ahead of him, inelegant and upset but by all means, harmonious.

“Nothing,” George mutters, a lie in every sense of the word, but Sapnap doesn’t need to know that.

They’re sat on one of the wooden picnic tables that lie on the edge of the grass just outside of their school building, shrouded in the shadow of a tree, as glaring light flickers down from an amber sky and settles on their folded bodies. It's a regular sight, a regular day, and the underside of the table is dry even after the storm that had poured down the day before, but the way that George raises a palm and covers his eyes isn’t just to shield him from the inevitable blindness.

He hears Sapnap’s edge before he sees it, idle blue going unnoticed for a millisecond as they sit in what’s nothing close to silence, tension held by George and George only, souring the air.

“You’re lying,” Sapnap comments, eyes on the other as he speaks. And if they weren’t in such an open space then the possibility of George’s tongue falling loose and his vision glowing pink would be that much higher, but they’re not, they’re in public and to make matters worse, out of the corner of George’s eye he can see the outline of a character dressed in black, tufts of blond hair poking out stiff in a familiar fashion.

George can’t understand where things went wrong.

A drive home in silence. The slamming of a doorframe before George sinks down against it.

Maybe it was his own fault, perhaps it was just Dream being cautious, smarter than George can ever acknowledge. But despite that sense, the pink in George’s grasp still hasn’t left, instead the fire he’d been holding towards Dream has been turned to face his brother—Sapnap bearing the brunt of George’s every flickering emotion.

“I’m not.”

"I know what will cheer you up," Sapnap says, godly as though he knows George's inner workings, brazen like he's all the other could ever need. "We could go to the movies."

"The movies?" George scoffs. He lifts a painted hand to cover his eyes, an unclear blue fog radiating from the air around him as he shows his discontent.

But Sapnap doesn't take it. Proud, he stands by the table and proud he forces George up with him.

"It'll be fun," he defends. "We haven't been in ages. If we don't go again soon I don't know how I'll cope."

Something gold can flicker across his expression for a moment, flashing wildly in an unsuccessful attempt to catch George's eye. It's a scene he's been a part of so many times, the rush he'd once felt when just his best friend was enough to keep him satisfied, twisting up inside of him before it drifts away—taken like cherry blossom to be replaced with a candied heart.

Because George's mind is back on black snakebites and a guy that doesn't really want him, and nothing that his "best friend" can do will change that.

"I know," Sapnap exclaims. "We can get my brother to drive. I don't think he has plans today."

"No," George snaps, his harsh tone tumbling and crashing to the ground with enough grace to cause a canyon. And the look that Sapnap wears is obvious, questioning, but there's no real way to offer a silvered explanation, so George doesn't, tongue loose and mind dark. "I don't want to see Dream right now."

The way that Sapnap stills makes the air grow tight, suffocating them both in the blue they can't let go of. Perhaps that's what causes George to look away so quickly, tear his eyes from the scene in the hopes of finding relief in another conversation. So he scans and he scans, pretends not to notice Sapnap's incessant grumbling as he pokes the bear and makes eye contact with the guy that's out to get him, dark piercings glimmering in the light even from halfway across a field.

They make eye contact for half a second, maybe even less, George being the first to pull away from the intense gaze that Dream had locked over him to point his eyes to the floor instead. It's not the same as shy smiles and awkward flirting, it's confusion and it's purple, because if Dream had been the one to reject George in the first place then he has no right to be looking at him like he's lost something special.

Blowing things out of proportion has always been a trait that George has held close, because when things go south, the easiest thing to do is run; hide and hope that the shrapnel from an explosion won't catch up and cause a scar. Maybe listening to Dream's explanation would've been smart, it could have given the clear points that George has been searching for, but when rejection looks so imminent, why would he stick around? Why wouldn't he shut down every single conversation that the other starts?

Dream has his arm around a brunet—a guy, almost similar to George in stature—albeit a slight difference in height—with the other reaching further on Dream's chest than George ever could. And it's not jealousy because George doesn't know the relations that they hold, but the feeling that slices through his stomach isn't enjoyable either.

Perhaps it's a statement, a fuck you to George that's intended to tell him that Dream could do better. Any day, any time, Dream can always find someone stronger to take out on meaningless dates, flatter with hollow compliments and hold as though they mean the world—but then again, it could all be in George's head.

His own brain is out to get him and unfortunately it's working.

"Are you even listening to me?" Sapnap asks, ripping George out of his own mind with a tone that's fuelled by annoyance and nothing less. "Because it doesn't seem like you are."

"I'm listening," George lies. He turns in his seat, straightening his back to try and seem like he's invested in the conversation.

Perhaps it's wrong to be sitting there, surrounded by cheer while mourning the loss of something he'd never had, but that's all George can do. He sits and uses his "friend" to come down from the high of Dream's kiss. Because he's hooked, and perhaps that's dumb, but saccharine lips still ghost against his own even when they're apart.

Sapnap is staring at him—a close call where George shakes the thoughts and pretends it's fine to be thinking these things, holding deceitful blue and wondering if Sapnap can see the strands. Though he's not the only one looking, because even if George has forced himself to stop staring in the direction of the blond, those piercing green eyes still remain settled on his outline, punching splintered holes into the shell of his clothing and bleeding white when nothing else happens.

"Then what's got you so upset?" Sapnap questions.

"It's not a big deal," George reasons, because it's not. "I'm just feeling under the weather. Lonely y'know."

"Lonely?" Sapnap frowns. He grips onto the edge of the table, standing slightly to position himself just over the other, the edge of red power that he normally holds only being amplified.

"It's nothing," George mumbles. The words feel light on his tongue.

Weakness fuels George's curiosity. He glances back in Dream's direction and acts as though he doesn't, sticky sweet toffee blinding his view as he searches for the other and pretends not to latch onto the purple and green hoodie that had swamped the brunet he'd been holding before.

Dream isn't there though. For better or for worse, he's disappeared from the other's view—perhaps hiding with someone else who'll spread their legs for him in an instant, or breaking another guy's heart without really having to try. Sense says that George should stop thinking about it, he's only making things harder for himself, but the sick part of him that gets off on the pain, likes the way that heartache makes him feel. How it makes him hurt.

Downturned gaze and stagnant eyes, that's all that George puts on.

He waits for another question from Sapnap but it never comes—although in retrospect that's anything but the truth.

"Hey," Sapnap mumbles, not at George and not in a tone that's familiar. "What're you doing here?"

"What?" Honey asks, crinkling and folding and ruining George's perception, having come just to hurt him and finding it so easy to stay calm while it does. "Can't I just come to see how you're doing?"

The silent fight between laying low and causing a scene lasts far longer than imaginable. George sits, and he waits, and he wonders if Dream's looking at him, unsure if that's really what he wants or if it's the only option his heart can handle. It's wrong, George knows it, because the conversation he'd barely been holding with Sapnap is almost forgotten, the only thing on George's mind being purple toned instructions on how to look busy while not thinking anything at all.

Unsurprisingly, the world moves unchanged around their table. People walk, and leaves brush, everything so unaffected by their petty unspoken feud, but life where George sits seems more complex. So he wallows in that pity and hopes that Dream has only come to ask for a pen, or suggest the meal that he and Sapnap will surely have later—the two are brother's after all, even if George wishes they weren't.

“I guess you can?” Sapnap shrugs, somehow catching George’s eye before turning back to Dream’s. Aventurine swirls hover at the end of George’s vision relentlessly. “Are you going to sit?”

There’s no answer so George assumes the worst, feeling the bench he sits on dip lower with the weight of a larger body next to his. He doesn’t look to check black leather or blond hair (although he assumes it’s just as messy and unkempt as usual) because there’s the possibility that seeing Dream look so perfect while George can’t even think the same, is too much to handle.

“What are you guys talking about?” Dream asks. He speaks as though it’s normal, like he doesn’t carry that cloud of strawberry sugar that George can only hope to hate. And as a result of the dark scowl that George wears, blackened frown lines etch their way onto his expression, clearly pinning it there for those around him to see.

“Well George is in a mood today,” Sapnap starts, clearly unable to see when he should stop. “So I’m trying to convince him to come see a movie with me.”

“A movie?”

Even the edge to Dream’s tone is pretty. Annoying and angered in George’s mind, but pretty, nonetheless.

“Yeah,” Sapnap continues, shrugging in the image in George’s mind and settling even while Dream sits between them. “I was thinking of that place close to our house, you know the one.”

George stills.

Infliction is blatant in Dream’s tone, unwavering blue nerves running through each word as he speaks without throwing a single glance in George’s direction. “I don’t think I do.”

“Come on,” Sapnap drones, rolling his eyes. “You take, like, all of your dates there.” A pause, perhaps to give Dream the chance to come clean, or purposely intended to make George’s skin crawl. “The old place, near the diner you go to. I don’t think George has ever been.”

It’s like a hammer has been wedged through George’s chest, slowly hacking away while he sits and takes it, only having the effort to bleed stolen sugar and the prettiest lilac flowers. Truly, what did he expect? He should have known exactly the kind of person that Dream is, it’s on him for thinking he’d be any different. But for some reason, the admission hurts more than it should, especially with the way Dream offers up no rebuttal. Instead staying silent and hoping the words can’t get any worse.

The benefit of the doubt says that maybe Dream’s just lost, unable to find the right thing to say, and too scared to take a proper step in case they get caught. But George is scared too, and he may have admitted to not being a good person, but pushing when the other isn’t ready wouldn’t be right by any means, even George can understand that.

Sapnap stands in silence, waiting for the hidden debate that George is having to pass. And while he does, the point on his face goes smooth and George has to try and not latch onto the idea of sticking with him forever, being the friend he needs and making up for past lackluster performances. Still, it’s easier said than done.

Unease filters through the air for few minutes, hanging low and circling like fog to try and throw the three off of their tracks, and George only finds the words to speak when he sees other’s gazes stapled firmly to his figure, waiting.

“Yeah.” Lying is the easiest tool to handle. “Never.”

George doesn't need to look at Dream to know he's staring. The way pure viridian digs into his skin and burns the edges would be hard to ignore. It's almost as though Dream is questioning George's answer, judging him for the things he's saying while refusing to own up to his own sins. And the speed in which it plays out manages to make George's head spin.

“So are you feeling up to it?” Sapnap asks, clearly not seeing George's turmoil.

It's like he's doing it all to spite him, as though he has some crimson vendetta against George that causes his every word to harness deep intent.

“I don't know.” It's a moment that barely passes. George makes the mistake of looking up, latching onto a sea of green just to cringe at the way his expression betrays him and declares awe within seconds. He's pathetic and he's tired, and it's too much to be thinking of how Sapnap feels, so instead George focuses on himself, frowning and trying not to break when Dream smiles like he's done no wrong. “I think I should be going to class anyway.”

“Oh, chemistry right?” Dream pipes up, clearly ignoring the death glare that's sent in his direction. “I have that too, I'll walk you.”

*Why?*

Panic blares red, and intensity glares purple. George stands as soon as he finds the strength, slinging his bag over his shoulder and barely sending half a glance in Sapnap's direction. The other will be fine though, they'll see each other later.

It's almost ironic—the way the sun filters so perfectly over the three of them when in reality George holds a darkened burden and drags Dream along by another leather rope. But there's no way to change the weather, over the years George has learned to sit down and deal with it.

“You don't need to come,” George says in the blond's vague direction. “I'd rather go by myself.

“No I insist,” Dream dismisses, standing. “Bye Sapnap, we'll see you later.”

It'd be so much harder if the blond was less charming, harder to let him stay and easier to send him away. But somehow, the smile that Dream wears and the golden specks that line his grin have wormed their way under George's nails and stuck so he's unable to dig them out.

So instead of facing the trouble, George walks, pretending not to notice the way that Dream hovers around him with a cloud of pomegranate questions surrounding his every movement.

Having to tell himself to be angry isn't right, it complicates things. Because George has a reason to be angry, he *should* be angry. But he's as strong as he is weak, and apparently, blond hair and black piercings are the direct way to his heart.

“What do you want?” George has to ask, barely stepping over the raised path that lines the gap between the grass and the building.

One glance over his shoulder and he's done for, fucked, so George makes sure to stare ahead, focusing on the path and not the guy that had kissed him and ran.

*It was just a kiss, a simple, simple kiss with a thousand explanations. (All of which, George refuses to hear.)*

“To explain,” Dream hopes, sounding breathless in the way that George hates. He’s slow, needs to jog to catch up with the other’s fast pace, but if Dream wants it enough then he’ll run, or at least that’s what George thinks.

Maybe he’s snappy with his answer, shutting off everything around him so he can focus in on solely hating the other despite how unjust it feels, but George thinks he’s allowed to be a little short, unfair. Dream hurt him, after all. “Not going to happen.”

The weight on his shoulders seems heavier than usual, bag dragging him down further than it normally does. But George still manages to carry it, pretending he doesn’t want the other to reach over and help him out. Each breath he takes shows up in front of his face, a puff of clouded white burning the backs of his teeth with its chill, and it’s an awful thought to have, but George still wonders if Dream’s lips against his would shield him from that air.

Realistically, George knows that he could be over exaggerating, making a big deal when things should be so easy to explain. But then again, if Dream can hurt him once then there’s no stopping him from doing it time and time again.

“Come on George,” Dream pleads, still following along like he’s George’s personal guard dog. There for him and him only. “You can’t be angry at me when you won’t even let me tell you what I meant.”

“I know what you meant,” George bites.

“No, you don’t.” A hand comes to rest on George’s shoulder. It’s not as big as Sappnap’s, but the touch is strong and it’s intentions are clear, meant to guide George into a turn and bring him back so they can be face to face, standing in front of the door before a hallway while Dream’s admirers rip George to shreds. “Come on, stop.”

“Really Dream?” George seethes, bleeding red over an untouched canvas. His arms go up, shaking Dream’s already loose grip off of him, only for it to return and pull George closer, just to force his tone away from a yell to the angered whisper that’s better for them both.

The other stands still.

“You take all your dates there?” Scorn. Scoffing. A biting tone. “Am I really not that special?”

“It’s not like that.” It’d be stupid to believe. George wants to though. “Sappnap doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

“He sounded like he did.”

“He was wrong. I wouldn’t do that to you.” Dream’s tone is soft, his words stay flat just to make sure George doesn’t jump, and it shouldn’t be working, because George still can’t wrap his head around any good reason he has to trust the other. But when Dream talks to him in a cherry red tone, it’s hard to stop his mind from spinning. “I really do like you George, I just want to explain.”

Even if no one is pointing and laughing, it still feels as though George is being watched, as though Dream even standing close to him is something of a spectacle. Perhaps it’s because they know Dream’s type, and his ways, or it’s because they know his brother, that and the fact that George shouldn’t be staring at the other with a muddled mix of disgust and admiration in his eyes but he *is*.

“Let go of me,” George shakes, an uncertain waver in his voice that’s only caused by Dream’s half-smile.

The snake bites are black. They're rounded, poking out just under Dream's lip and hooking over so metal can wrap around the pink and make the contrast seem kissable. It's a flurry of thoughts at first, all uncontrollable, all-consuming, and quite frankly it takes George a second too long to shake them all, especially because he doesn't really want to.

"Fine." Dream drops George in an instant, lets him crash and fall and burn before picking the shrapnel up from the floor while trying not to cut his hands. "Just let me talk."

At the core, George can't be angry. He finds himself falling for Dream's words far too quickly, an undeserved redemption cracking through his skull and making the rose he holds stick harder with thorns. "Not here," he ends up mumbling. The two words feel more like a confession than anything else he's ever said, a pure display of his weakness while he clings on to the overall resistance to change.

Why would he? He has the guy.

Dream looks at George like he's burning. Unsafe to be near, perhaps a void of all the things Dream doesn't want to see, and it's evident in the way his eyes glare black before returning to the viridian that George can just make out. But despite the hesitance on his face, Dream makes no attempt to run, instead holding onto his silver lifeline and refusing to share it with the other.

"So?"

It makes George huff, rolling his eyes before he grabs onto Dream's arm and pulls him a little closer. He's being dumb, impulsive, but he's angry and he's confused, and he'll reiterate it until everyone can understand that he can't be blamed for his own actions.

A small hum runs through the gap between Dream's lips, black lined eyes widening slightly as he's dragged forwards and steered towards the most discreet thing that George can see, which may or may not be a supply closet, barely used and completely out of sight. Groaning, he pushes Dream through the door, holding no regard for the way that it looks, or the way that the story will be relayed to Sapnap later.

There's a crash when Dream stumbles against the racks behind him, hair tousled and lips apart. And like this, George is able to forget the way that Dream had crushed him after pressing cherry to his mouth with those same lips.

It's dark when George closes the door, cramped when he takes off his bag so he can step back and push some distance between himself and Dream. And what makes it worse, is the way that Dream's tone deepens and his breath gets heavier, so painstakingly close to George's ear, while so disgustingly tempting.

They're close, standing perfectly still in the dark, with Dream leaning over George to press him against the door and keep him there, smirking even though he should be tense.

"Wow, the supply closet?" He laughs, lavender. "I didn't take you for that kind of guy George."

Weakly, George lands a hit against his chest, only serving to push him back rather than injure. "Shut up and help me find a light."

He searches for the switch, hands brushing over the cold wall before coming to rest on the plastic shell, and when he flicks it on it takes him a second to get used to the blinding yellow around him. Eyelids flutter shut for half a second, George squinting while he assumes Dream does the same.

They're both quiet and it's stifling. George's heart crashes against his chest, renaissance hands

being tucked into the pockets of rolled jeans as he tries to stay calm. An ocean can fall, secrecy can thunder, but at the end of the day, right now it's just them, and George has to learn to handle that.

When he opens his eyes, Dream is looking at him, scanning his features with unabashed want. And it bleeds the question that if he wants it so badly, then why did he say something so abrupt? Why did he ruin George's night with a few simple words?

The light catches onto the ends of dirty blond hair perfectly, running down with the cold and tracing the ends where they melt into Dream's complexion, the brown of his freckles standing out so perfectly against the metal in his face. He's wearing ear piercings, only little ones, George isn't sure if he's seen them before, but they serve to make Dream seem that much more compelling, like if George stays for a little longer then he'll be able to find out a thousand new things.

Dream would look good with a nose ring, maybe an eyebrow piercing too, George can think of it all. But he likes the lip piercings most of all. He likes the way they'd felt against him, cold and rough, a perfect dissimilarity to the way that Dream had kissed him—pink and pretty and more tart than any pomegranate seed that George has ever tasted.

It's bittersweet in a way, because George isn't fluent in any unspoken language, so when he meets Dream's eye and sees the smile that he keeps, it's a white hot reminder that George has no idea what's going on in the other's head—he's truly alone in his thoughts.

Perhaps that's a good thing. Being too close is always a set up for failure. He and Sapnap are close, that doesn't mean they know everything about each other, people are meant to have distance, that's what keeps them safe.

Dream's tongue pokes out from between his lips—George hates the way he watches.

A beat of silence, neither even daring to breathe, but it's ruined by Dream because of course it is. Although it would be a lie for George to say he hasn't missed the honeyed voice anyway.

"Staring," Dream sings, mocking.

The words are punctuated with a laugh, ivory teeth flashing with marbled white as Dream bears his smile and glances to George as though he's meant to do the rest. But it's embarrassment that courses through George's veins now, because there's no use pretending to be irate when the other can already see his rupture, he's red-faced and exposed and his every façade is starting to crumble

"Shut up," George scoffs, desperately trying to force some bite into his tone. "Are you going to explain, or what?"

It's as though Dream doesn't take it seriously. He's standing close enough for George to feel his breath against his lips. Holding himself like this is an everyday occurrence and there's no real thing to feel bad about. And for the first time in a while, the feeling that George holds isn't awe, or riddled in sugar, it's twisted and it's sour and it makes his gaze grow cold.

"You look great today." Dream smirks, biting on his lower lip and letting his eyes flicker down, unabashed staring so blatant that it'd be impossible to go unnoticed. "So pretty. I like seeing you in pink."

There's no way for George to keep frustration off of his expression. He's angry and it's noticeable, outlined in red and radiating blue from Dream's touch alone. Still, Dream doesn't seem to take the hint. Instead, he takes George's anger as apprehension, doubling down on his compliments by dropping his head lower to let pointed fangs dip out from between the cranberry red of his lips.



“No, really,” he smiles, pressing. “It suits you, makes you look nice when you blush.”

A roll of the eyes, George’s hands making their way in front of his chest so he can cross his arms and keep up the effort not to smile. “You can’t flirt your way out of this.”

“Why not?” Dream doesn’t seem to understand. He looks at George with confidence. George returns the stare. “You can’t tell me it isn’t working,” he laughs, raising an eyebrow when he doesn’t hear a light giggle in response. “Not even a little?”

If there was a way to get under George’s every nerve then Dream must have the handbook. He looks at George with defiance, structure, a desire in the blacks of his eyes that he reinforces with his posture and untimely definition. But even though his words feel like taunts, and his stance feels like a negation, George can’t seem to hate Dream. He’s just too pulling.

Conceivably, that’s why George is so annoyed by it all. Because hating Dream should be easy, or pretending to do so would be easier. They were never even dating, that’s the real issue. They weren’t in love, and they weren’t an item, but George is still pissed. He’s annoyed, and he’s confused, and in the end, he’ll find a way to pin it all on Sapnap.

“Are these the same lines you were saying to your other little boy toy earlier.”

Pitiful anger runs through George’s words, barely there but filled with spite. Because there’s nothing left to really say, he’s closed off and that’s that. That’s the only thing he can be.

It’s pathetic to be holding the torch so close to his heart, because all it does is make his chest grow, hot and cold, and bouncing between the states. It’s pathetic to say he wants Dream to have a bad day too. Because when they stand face to face, expressions both tight, Dream’s with exasperation and George’s with reddened malice, it’s hard for George to pretend he wants to hurt Dream in a way that actually matters.

Realistically, George doesn’t really know what he wants at all.

Because even when they’re here, almost arguing simply because George refuses to listen, actually wanting to inconvenience Dream in any way feels wrong. Eyes flicker down, pink, bitten lips being held apart by a sugar sweet tongue.

“Don’t call him that,” Dream snaps, more assertive than he ever has been. And it’s just enough to make George scoff, breath riddled with a thousand emotions, because why on earth does Dream care so much about another guy when he’s been trying to grovel at George’s feet since they first saw met.

George crosses bare arms, ignoring the way a chill runs down his spine when Dream’s gaze gets stronger, more intrusive. “Wow, you must really be into him,” he half-laughs, mocking.

“I’m not, he’s just a friend,” Dream is quick to correct. “But I do think you should treat him with some respect, he hasn’t hurt you.”

That’s the thing that gets George. It makes him laugh, bitter and angry and green above all else. “But you have.”

“I know that,” Dream mutters. “I wanted to talk to you about it though.”

“I don’t think I want to talk to you.”

It’s a lie. George *shouldn’t* want to talk to Dream. He still does, though. Possibly because running

so close to the edge is the biggest thrill that George has had in a while, maybe because hurting Sapnap is second nature by now, either way it hurts far more than a frivolous fling should.

Narrowed eyes point in Dream's direction, blazing red and edged with green. They're scheming, not really hurt but pretending to be, and George thinks that it'd be far easier to articulate his own feelings if he understood them himself.

"God George," Dream mumbles, compelling and compelled. "You are *such* a bitch."

Teasing feels light. Scorn feels flirtatious.

"Fuck you," George bites, malicious with a silver smile.

It only takes half a second for Dream's eyes to flick down, deep green irises running over the thin material of George's shirt and prying it from his skin with the gentlest of touches, leaving him cold and exposed under the dim light of a fully cramped closet.

It's intimate in the worst kind of way, enough to make George shiver and blush when he knows he shouldn't, just because being angered should be far easier than this, it shouldn't be this difficult to get over a stupid fucking crush.

"Are you at least going to apologise?" George questions, chasing a deafening silence with venom. "Tell me you didn't mean it?"

And it's as though Dream knows exactly what to say to keep George wrapped perfectly around his finger. He shrugs casually and shakes his head, honesty pouring from his every scratch.

There's mulberry dragging down his skin from invisible fingertips, possibly real, possibly not, either way it makes George glower. For reasons unbeknownst, he can still feel the other's lips on his, the touch ghosting over his skin in a pitiful attempt to make him shudder.

It's not cold this time. They aren't running from anyone. It's a moment of silence and a moment of clarity. A beat for George to look up and wonder why aventurine eyes have managed to cast such a spell over him.

One good date.

"No." Dream shakes his head, tone cutting like razor blades, sharp and unforgiving against fickle thoughts. "I meant it."

Dream is honest, to say the least. For better or for worse he's genuine—real. And to some extent, Sapnap is the same, brutally honest and continuously authentic, but somehow, when it's Dream it feels better. It feels like George doesn't need to be afraid.

They're staring at each other again, quietly observing the movements made, and Dream's gaze remains heavy throughout it all, either an amazing front or unabashed dedication.

"I really want to kiss you right now."

George inhales, breathy and light. Shaking under Dream stare. *Be angry. Make him beg for forgiveness.*

"Idiot," He bites. "I'm not going to kiss you, you hurt me."

When George stands he can't hold his head high. The attempt to keep his composure is too much,

and though exasperation causes reddened spots to grow on his skin, the bite of a forbidden apple running gold through his teeth manages to blind him. In a short, nervous breath, George rubs the stardust from his eyes, punctuating his fruitless vex with a scowl and waiting for something to happen—some form of redemption to occur.

And yet all Dream can provide is, “It was a misunderstanding.”

“You said we shouldn’t go out again.” George completes.

“I worded it wrong,” Dream laughs, rose clouds shadowing his figure. “I’m sorry.”

But it’s still not enough for George to really understand. Because Dream essentially cut everything off, cast it all aside just because he thought it was the easiest thing to do. And an explanation would’ve been nice, anything other than a silent car ride home and essential silence would have been good. Still, they can’t change the past, and even though there are multiple reasons for George to not go along with it so easily, he’s never been the smartest of guys.

Dream must take the silence as terror. He fills the air with strawberry words, dragging George’s gaze up to aventurine eyes and hoping to keep him hooked on their edge.

“I meant that we were being reckless, I didn’t want you to get hurt if Sapnap found out,” Dream mumbles, sounding more skittish than George has ever heard him. “It was stupid, but I figured cutting things off now would be easier for the both of us.”

It’s awful to admit, but it’s undoubtedly the first time that George has thought of Sapnap and his feelings since Dream cornered him. It’s not as though he doesn’t care, because Sapnap is good to him and George could never take that for granted, but at the same time, he can’t be thinking of someone who’s only intent is to hold him back while pretending they care.

George already knows he’s a bad person.

“That decision’s not just up to *you* Dream.” George laughs, a bitter, mocking chuckle that only fizzles out when Dream flinches and the hurt in his eyes runs rampant with purple streaks. “Why did you change your mind?”

“I couldn’t stop thinking about you.” Dream admits. “It’s cheesy, I know, but you’re all that’s been on my mind since that night. I had fun, you know, more fun than I’ve had in a while.”

The light above them rings with its shine, oblivious to the tension in the air as Dream’s gaze runs from one wall to another, keeping away from George with unmatched persistence. It only succeeds to make George aware of his own breathing, the way he holds onto what he can just see how long he’ll last before letting out the aired blue smile.

For better or for worse, Dream knows the way to George’s heart. He paints him with the prettiest pink, runs over his every feature with amber thumbs just to ease him up and make him susceptible to attack, and admittedly it works, because George is hazy and he can’t find it in himself to mind, although he’ll never go out without a fight.

“Who was the guy?”

Dream doesn’t seem shaken by the question—more so confused. “A friend,” he mumbles, lips arched in a saccharine curl.

It sounds normal and that’s what hurts. Because can George really trust Dream? He’s already been hurt once, and it could happen time and time again. No Sapnap to rub his shoulder or whisper that

it'll be okay against his ear because George has already cast him aside.

"Have you had sex with him?"

"No." The corners of Dream's lips pull up. "I'm saving myself for you."

He's cocky and it's attractive—confident in a way that Sapnap is too, and yet Dream wears the attitude so much better.

"I can't trust that," George chuckles. He might be flirting, he doesn't really know.

Tentative fingers make their way to brush over George's skin, rubbing pomegranate swatches over his forearm as they try to stake their claim over the patch. Even if he wanted to, George isn't sure that he'd be able to disregard the touch. It's light, and caring, and good enough to melt against—the dimness of the room only serving to make him swoon.

Anger is running from him in milliseconds, a pathetic display that he hopes that Dream won't catch onto. He's too forgiving, that's always going to be a bad trait of his, even when he's stubborn and refuses to take something back, George will always be forgiving. It's why Sapnap and he get along so well, they're the perfect balance—both equally headstrong and obstinate, but one bending too easily and the other refusing to snap for anyone—best friends.

"I'm still sorry though," Dream whispers, getting closer with each passing second. "I just thought that we were being a little too bold, you wouldn't want Sapnap to catch us, right?"

The truth sometimes hurts to hear, torn eardrums and mottled teardrops often come after. So George keeps his eyes wide, accusing as he makes sure Dream faces him with a light touch to the bottom of his jaw. "Apologise again," he demands, forcing the flush to stay down when Dream leans in a little more and lets his head hover above George's, intimate.

"I'm sorry Georgie." Dream's voice is no louder than a whisper, making sure George knows that the words are for him and him only. "I do like you."

Carmine darts to George's cheeks before he can stop it, blotching them with perfect cranberry just to frame his face a little more. He can't stay angry for long. There's no real reason for him to be mad. It was a misunderstanding, that's all.

"Does this mean I get a second chance?" Dream wonders aloud.

"Because you deserve one?" George questions. He'll make Dream work a little more, it's entertaining.

"Because you want to get to know me," Dream corrects. "I know you do."

"What happened to being scared?"

"I'm feeling reckless." It's said with a shrug, nectar flooding through Dream's veins and painting them gold so George can see it radiating from his skin. "And I know you like danger." He reaches out to touch George's shoulder, running the touch up so that one finger can press against his cheek, practically holding George in place while the metal of his rings pours ice onto wide blown features. "That, and my hands."

They stay close for far longer than they should, George letting his actions speak louder than words when he pushes his jaw up a little higher just to let his breath fan over Dream's face, so ridiculously intentional that he almost can't believe he's doing it. It's dark and he's scared, maybe

hoping that Dream is too. They're so close that he should be on fire, blazing for his sins while Sapnap holds the pitchfork that's punctured him a million times, but he's safe somehow, held close in Dream's light touch and led to believe that everything will be fine, that he's not betraying his best friend and barely even thinking about the consequences.

"Sapnap can never find out."

The words are grave. They're dark and said with intention, even when spoken pink against Dream's lips. It's the one thing that George knows he means, the one thing he'll never go back on, simply because he can have his fun while not ripping his best friend's heart to shreds. They can have trust, even if George isn't entirely honest.

There's no use in words when Dream's eyes tell all. He agrees silently, holding his objections behind fanged teeth so they lie just out of George's view, and George can't help but stutter when Dream's forehead hovers against his, dragging him out of betrayal and deception to make it all seem less severe.

"Can I kiss you?" Dream mumbles, far more assured than when George had asked, dotted with confidence and candied hearts even when they're alone in a janitor's closet, no one there to impress other than themselves.

"*Dream*," George hums, smiling beside himself.

"What?" Dream shrugs. "I want people to know you're taken."

It's far too intimate for a making-up conversation. They're moving so fast and George doesn't know if it's normal, let alone healthy. But what he does know is that he wants to kiss Dream. He wants to get over a petty misunderstanding and let himself be happy for once, because so far his day has already been ruined by Sapnap's persistence and there's no way he'll force himself to reject the guy he wants so badly.

After a moment, George chokes, apricot cries running from his shadow as he raises a questioning brow in the taller's direction. "I'm taken?"

"Let's not get into specifics."

"No, we will," George presses. He lets one hand curl into the material of Dream's shirt, keeping them close enough to touch, kiss. "If you're talking to me you're only talking to me. No one else. We're as good as exclusive, okay?"

Dream takes venom in his stride and rebuts it with cherry, defeat. "Of course."

George hardens his stare.

"I mean it. I'm not a cheater," Dream defends, eyes slipping down to strengthen his point. "I don't fuck around with people like that."

And although he shouldn't, George puts his faith in the words. He cradles his friendship with Sapnap before setting it down on the floor to let himself hold onto something new. And it's subtle and Sapnap will never actually know—George can balance more than one thing at once—but it still feels like terror.

"Then you can have a kiss," George relents, feeling Dream's grin for a millisecond. "Just be quick. We still have class, idiot."

So Dream moves fast. A chaste kiss is pressed against George's lips, not intense or ferocious, instead delicate and simple, enough to get them through the day. They dip out of the closet as covertly as they can, waiting between each disappearance as to try and avoid confrontation, but George is sure that the control is slipping from his features by the time he's gotten to class.

It happened so swiftly and George is yet to feel regret. He's gone back to the guy that hurt him and now he's there for good, all on a splinter of hope, the one thing that makes him sure it'll all be okay. Sugar sweet raspberry is on the tip of George's tongue at all times, reminding him of Dream and an imperfect date, though it's just the start of many memories, he hopes.

Because right now, George has everything and it's simple. Or at least he hopes it will be.

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George has never been good at emotion.

Loyalty is a different thing of course—loyalty is learnt, embedded in the threads of George's being, and he holds that lesson dear to his heart even if right now he's not the best at following it. Because usually, loyalty comes easily to George. He pays his debts and he's honest to the people that deserve it, knowing that people like Sapnap are the only reason George is who he is—they deserve faithfulness.

American high school ruined George's outlook on life.

After the big move, tradition was thrown out of the window. Bags were packed and personalities were stored, and to say it was jarring would be an understatement, because before that George had never had to make his own decisions.

Kids are mean, and teenagers are the meanest, but before George knew it he'd found a best friend that would protect him from the cruelty around. Perhaps they were both a bit shy, maybe the ability to tune out the world and focus on the niche things they were interested in was the thing that formed the bond, but it wasn't long before George and Sapnap were inseparable, quintessential.

Friendship is yellow; it's passive and striped. And when George is so used to the harsh red that is betrayal, looking back at simplicity can only be done through grey tinted glasses, the warped illusion of perfection only a figment of his imagination.

Sapnap gave George friendship. He introduced George to everyone he's ever known, and noted the way he's reacted, forging comfort by hand when none has lined the floorboards. But after a while gratitude starts to sour. George looks up and wonders if things can stay that way forever, if loyalty can go both ways when they're both still growing, finding themselves amongst the world.

So yellow starts to crack. Orange lines run down each corner and shake until they reach the centre of a shape that's never been defined. And the second life that George has only just gotten used to starts to tremble, forcing him back out of that comfort zone until he's abandoning loyalty once again.

In reality, that fracture could be George's fault. Maybe he held each side and bent until glass broke. Subconsciously, he could have stepped over painted lines and smudged them until they're nothing, but at the end of the day things are changing and George just needs to keep up.

Sapnap can't make decisions for George when he's never crossed the same bridges. Sapnap

doesn't have to look out for two people when he should only need to take care of himself. And loyalty hasn't completely broken when George still looks at Sapnap and wants his approval, but it's lessened, become strained even though Sapnap hasn't changed a fraction.

They're not distancing, but they're drifting, and it might not be in the same direction but when George steps on his boat and pulls up his anchor, he still hopes that Sapnap will do the same.

Dream may not be perfect, but George still likes him. It's more than a crush, and George is never going to try and justify his own emotions, but he knows what he wants, and right now that's Dream. So George is going to do what's good enough for him and not force Sapnap to lie stickily between the two situations. It's not up to loyalty to decide who George can and can't let into his arms.

And coincidentally, for the first time in forever, George feels as though he's taking ownership of his own life.

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It only takes a few days for Dream to fully wedge his way into George's routine.

It's an odd adjustment but George doesn't think he minds it. In fact, it's rather welcome.

George's feet are tucked under his knees as he sits on his bed and watches Dream swivel around on his desk chair, moving like he knows the room's layout by heart, despite this only being his second time there. The monitor behind him is switched on and showing green, the default Minecraft music spilling loud from the large headphones that sit unused on George's desk. It's only a distraction, something to give the two to talk about, but George has found that watching other people play the games he normally enjoys is actually interesting, fun.

Hanging out with Dream is surprisingly easy, too. They talk and they kiss, and Dream is far clingier than George could've ever imagined, spending almost every moment hanging off of George's side and doing his best to drag him down.

If George's parents have noticed the relationship then they haven't said anything. For all they know, Dream is just some random guy in George's grade that's become his friend over the past week, definitely not Sapnap's brother, that's been at the heights of George's worst thoughts for longer than he should've been.

There's still an element of distrust though. As much as George wants to believe that Dream would never use him in the way he has others, there's no real saying that that's true. Because Dream has a track record, everyone in their school knows it, he fucks people and then he leaves, that's all, but George can still cling onto the hope that he's different.

The phone in George's hand is cold, not switched off but covered in snow as the frost from his fingertips traces over his lock screen, a simple photo that he doesn't really want to look at. A quick motion forces George's gaze from the screen to his desk, dark eyes settling on an unkempt picture as Dream's hand moves to cover his mouse, dragging the cursor across the screen as he flicks through frames and makes himself busy.

It's almost surprising, how much George has learnt about Dream in the time in which they've been properly talking—not dating, not even close, but talking.

He's learnt that Dream's mom met Sapnap's father when he was seven, and that he and Sapnap had pretty much got on instantly. He's learnt that Dream hates spicy food, in fact, even cheetos are too much for him at times, which in George's opinion is pretty pathetic, something he definitely voiced only to get a false-hurt uproar in response.

But the one thing that stuck with him the most is that George learnt that Dream hates being normal, predictable. He hates when people look at him like they know his inner workings, his motivation for doing everything, because Dream isn't an open book that people can tear pages from whenever they please, he's as good red as he is blue. He's a person; complex.

A car hurries past the road below George's window, running streaks over the concrete as it's sound ripples through the glass just to cause some disturbance. George's displeasure is prominent on his face. The sound outside drags him away from Dream and makes him blurred, painted with a clouded air. Precise fingers tap against George's mouse, clicking away to get Dream further in the game, and George can't help but crack a smile.

It's been a while since his last real relationship. George can barely remember the last time he was with someone properly, let alone intimately, and he would say that he has a tendency to rush headfirst into the unknown but something about Dream makes him want to. Perhaps it's his charm.

"We should go out tomorrow," Dream calls from ahead, the back of his hair swaying gold in George's direction.

"Yeah?" George hums. "Where to?"

"I'm thinking a restaurant," Dream suggests, catching George's eyes for a fraction of a second just to douse him in honey. "Somewhere fancy."

Technically it'd be their second date, not the first. And although George still doesn't know if he's being taken to all the same places that Dream took his other conquests, he doesn't think he minds. A restaurant is a restaurant—he can't exactly expect Dream to find somewhere new for everyone.

"Fancy?" Arched eyebrows raise in surprise. Cherry painted hands reach out to try and find Dream's charcoal ones. "How are we meant to afford that, mister?"

"We'll find a way," Dream suggests, strands of hair being raked through black fingertips as those ivory fanged teeth make a point of chewing the lip that's just in George's viewpoint. "Maybe we could ask for it for free, nobody could resist that face."

There are times when George wonders what he likes so much about Dream. It can't just be the looks or the way he's looked at, there has to be something more that means George will risk his closest friendship just for the chance of getting to be with Dream for as long as he can.

A part of him thinks it's the comfort. It's an unspoken thing that makes George feel safe, comforted, whenever he's in Dream's presence. And he doesn't think he's felt anything like it before. It's like he's been coiled in stardust and honey and has the God's protection raining down on him at all times, all because Dream treats him like a person, someone that can make their own decisions and be proud of them.

Not to say that Sapnap doesn't do that too, But George doesn't want to kiss Sapnap, he never has and never will. Dream on the other hand is comfortable in every sense. Emotional, physical, and the ability to leave a conversation in silence and still be able to pick it up the next morning is unmatched. That's why George doesn't want to let it go just yet.



“You’re an idiot,” he mutters, far softer than intended. “But I’d love to go on another date with you.”

A smile grows wide over Dream’s lips, pulling the snake bites to opposite corners of his mouth and making the black spikes gleam, while he spins to face the other. He’s wearing George’s hoodie, something that he’d stolen from his closet as soon as he’d found his way into his room. And usually the items that are far too big for George are reserved for Sapnap, but when a hoodie that’s two sizes too large on George fits perfectly snug on Dream, there’s no chance that he’ll object.

A honeyed tone makes Dream’s words appear fond, reminiscence lining the sentences he speaks even though it’s nothing to really look back on. “This time you won’t force me out into the rain?”

The thin line of George’s lips curves upwards. “No promises.”

And the world goes on, small movements in the air all dancing oblivious to George’s weakness, swirling around as though they can’t tell the breaks in his structure. The room smells normal, and the air doesn’t seem thicker, but even if it’s all the same to the touch, George can still see a difference in tone.

Speckled brown dots itself over his nose, freckles coming out under minimal sun even in the darkest of times, and Dream has been expressing his wish to run his fingertips over the traces from the first time he saw them. The days are getting shorter and the possibility of keeping company feels strained, but through and through George enjoys it, because the easy flirting and simple smiles are far too nice to let go of.

The alerts on George’s phone are loud. He let Sapnap choose his own notification sound and hasn’t changed them since, why would he? So the blaring sound cuts through the air in one fatal swoop, bringing ash to fire and setting George’s eardrums alight in a blaze of orange.

“Who’s that?” Dream asks, standing.

His shoulders look broader when he picks himself up to hover in front of George, almost as though one touch from him would send George toppling over. The rings on his fingers pick up light in a way that George loves; Dream’s hands flex and hold a rosy hue over the knuckles when he notices George watching and makes the effort to set himself up even further.

And one more second and George could forget himself in the sight, but he’s not smart enough to find the easy out, instead he loves the thrill of sadness.

“Huh?”

“Someone’s messaging you,” Dream shrugs, feet carrying him over to where George sits just so he can wrap himself around the other’s stomach, head hooked over his shoulder to press ill-defined, pink lips against a strict jawline.

It makes George giggle—a ginger sound bubbling hot from his throat before he can stop it, and all it does is make the warmth in his chest grow fuzzier. There are lips on his neck, trailing down so that Dream can find the space to bury his nose against the alabaster skin.

A hum runs through George’s bones and settles by his ear, Dream’s breathing coming so close to his heart that it’s magenta, like ecstasy to feel.

Under the hem of his shirt, above the waistband of his pants, Dream’s hand curls around warm skin, the coolness of his palm making George flinch only to melt into the space that Dream occupies behind him. The feeling is so close and so intimate and George can barely comprehend a

silver reason to feel doubt.

“Phone,” Dream reiterates, muffled.

It doesn’t manage to snap George from his daze, only makes him start. “It’s probably Sapnap,” he acquaints, no doubt that it definitely is.

Right now he can’t face him though; if he does then he’ll let something cranberry slip.

“Are you not going to answer?” Dream asks, unmoving from his position behind George.

Mulberry lips part, the coolness of metal piercings being pressed to George’s neck in a fruitful attempt to make him fault. He shouldn’t be getting worked up from a feeble touch like this, but when Dream moves with such intention, it’d be hard not to squirm.

George shakes his head, ignorant to the way his phone doesn’t stop shaking. “I’ll call him later.”

Against his skin, shark bone teeth graze unmarked patches, unintentionally causing George’s breath to hitch as he pushes his phone to one side and falls into the other’s embrace. The need to stay by Dream’s side may just be because of the lack of true connections, living a life with so little friends will never be good for anyone’s mentality, but George has never been the clingy type per say, perhaps Dream just brings out a different side of him.

“What?”

And maybe that’s a good thing. Often the best things come by surprise; they happen by chance. So of course George feels different, content in fact, because this is new, and a lot of the time, new things are dangerous, so he’ll take it in stride and wonder how far he can go without looking back, having to break the news to Sapnap.

“Nothing,” Dream murmurs. “It’s just, you two seem to be hanging out a lot less.”

“I guess,” George admits. It’s true of course but the reason for it is obvious. “It doesn’t really matter though, it’s not like I can explain why I’m so busy all of a sudden.”

It’d be stupid to assume George can hold Sapnap in one hand and Dream in another. In reality, two lives are far harder to manage than one, especially when one is so painfully pink while the other struggles in grey stripes.

Dream fits perfectly against George’s back, holding him so dear while he says words that shouldn’t feel venomous. “Still, you should talk to him.”

The worst part is, George knows he’s right. If he doesn’t talk to Sapnap then things will only get worse—cause them to grow distant and frozen while a boy slides their way between an everlasting bond to pull red lace strings between the frayed edges.

A second passes with uneasy tempo. Dream rubs swirled patterns against the pale expanse of George’s skin. All in all, George feels good.

“I will,” he sighs, though he doesn’t really know if he means it. Because sometimes George does things that don’t make sense. He makes rash decisions, commits stupid, stupid acts, but at the end of the day he chases what’s fun, and right now, that’s this, even if it scares him just the same.

A hand on George’s jaw angles his face up, forces him to look lust in the eye.

“I mean it,” Dream says sternly. “You’re his best friend, spending time with you is like the highlight of his day.”

The honesty in his tone is raw, human, and it’s not healthy for George to push past it all and focus on how much he likes the vowels leaving Dream’s throat, but he does it anyway, refusing to even think about the way Sapnap could feel because Sapnap knows nothing. He doesn’t need to be sad when he doesn’t have the whole situation.

“Am I that fun to be around?” George laughs instead, body turned so his side is pressed to Dream’s chest.

There’s no laughter in response, a fond look perhaps, but conflict rests on the easy-going lines of Dream’s face too. Eyebrows raise, eyes point down, and George can’t help but smile and roll his eyes amongst the tension in the air.

“Fine, I’ll ask him to hang out in a few days.”

A peace offering. George isn’t too sure if he means the words but it’s worth it to see Dream’s posture relax—dispute still red on his features but for reasons that George can’t quite understand, perhaps it’s nothing to do with him at all. He turns his head to look up at Dream fully, smiling small to make the offer seem genuine, and a strong hand trails up from the side of his stomach to rest at the bottom of George’s jaw.

A sudden movement catches George by surprise. Strong, plain arms move to wrap around his waist, a yelp forcing its way from his throat before he can slow it, and the only thing that keeps George stable is the way he flaws and struggles to lock his arms around Dream’s head, pulling their bodies close while Dream manhandles him into a lying position.

“Good boy,” Dream praises, fanged and smug and devastatingly attractive.

George’s legs are wrapped around his waist, Dream’s chest hovering directly over his as he wills his breath to slow, eyes wide and nerves spiking. The words that fall from pink lips cause George’s face to burn, an embarrassed, mulberry blush making its way over his nose and settling on the heights of his cheeks. They’re close enough for George to see Dream’s every flaw, each freckle or patch or uneven tone George can see in perfect detail, and the thoughts of Sapnap and meagre guilt manage to slip once again.

“You’re blushing,” Dream cooes, dipping down to catch George’s lips in a short kiss, pomegranate scented and overwhelmingly sweet. “We haven’t even had sex yet and I’m learning everything about you.”

George’s eyebrows raise. It’s sudden and he’s faulting, but his neck cranes back for Dream to slot himself against, nevertheless.

“Yet?”

“That’s where this is leading right.” Dream says it like it’s fact, as though he and George haven’t just built something sudden, meaningless, like they’re always going to go strong and develop the things they have. “I’m the doting almost-boyfriend, and you’re my pretty little boy toy that’ll eventually spread those pretty little legs of his.”

“*Dream*,” George groans. “Don’t say it like that.”

Chuckling, Dream glances down. “What do you mean?”

George shrugs as best he can from where he lies, staring up to meet honey as it hovers above him while shrouded in colour. “Like I’m easy.”

Moonlight arches and doors swing open, a draft running through the room that pins their bodies closer, almost forces them to collide. And Dream’s look hardens before it melts, the rush of confusion that follows so purple that it’s almost audible.

At the core, George isn’t sure what he really means, because it’s bitten and red and ultimately far too confusing, but what he does know is that he feels odd, because sex is a big step and yet Dream makes it sound easy, as though it’s nothing. It could be because George isn’t like Dream. He doesn’t beckon over whoever will take him, or let anyone who glances at him right into his bed. George doesn’t do that type of thing—he has more humility than that.

But that’s not the right thing to say. Simply because George doesn’t even know if he does have that modesty.

When he looks at Dream his eyes dip down to black snakebites, watching his lower lip be pulled between his teeth as Dream’s look turns to focus, shaggy blond hair falling in front of his eyes and keeping distance from his forehead.

“That’s not what I meant,” Dream mutters.

Teasing forces its way back into George’s tone. “It’s what it sounded like.”

“I’m sorry,” Dream tries. “You’re not easy, George, I was kidding.”

When Dream shifts, the lower part of his body presses closer against George. Practically grinding against him while only performing the most innocent actions. It’s warm, and it’s normal, and it shouldn’t make George flush but it does, pink raspberry running sticky from his grip as he smiles dopily up at Dream.

“Good.” He turns his head to one side, baring his neck for no one to touch. And he shouldn’t say it but he does, because at the end of the day George trusts Dream, in their situation he has to. “But I guess I do want to try.” His eyes are glassy, perhaps imagining it all while pretending he’s not. “With you.”

Dream almost looks confused. “Try what?”

“Sex.”

Because maybe it’s out of his comfort zone, but George can’t help but want. It’s all going so fast, and it’s all so new, and yet the feeling of desperation still spreads through his chest like a wildfire whenever he’s in the other’s presence—a clear indication that loyalty is lost and greed is no longer taboo.

He wants to know how it feels, if the Dream in his mind lives up to the real thing. And it’s a large step, they’ve barely been touching for days but George already knows he’s ready, that he wants to throw himself at Dream and let his feet catch him when they can.

For too long George has been throwing himself head first into the deep end, hoping he can swim or that a lifeguard will be by the shore to stop him from drowning. It might not be smart but so far it’s working, and George is having the most fun he’s ever had in his life, so he has to be doing something right.

One of Dream’s hands moves to press against the sheets by George’s head, caging him in so there’s

no real escape. The line of his veins is subtle, barely defined, but each time he moves the bones in his hand flex and make the green that much more prominent. In order to see it, George has to crane his neck to one side, flick his eyes down and pretend he doesn't notice the way Dream stares on with fondness in his gaze.

And in the quiet moments like these, George can understand his own decisions, truly believe the things he tells himself when he's alone in his room, his house, and his bed.

"We don't have to," George mumbles. "I guess I just think that doing that, with you, would make things..." There's cherry on his lips, sugar melting sweet on his tongue until saccharine is all George can see. "...real."

"Sex makes things real?" Dream asks, soft like honey while holding the grate he's always kept. "Are they not real already?"

"You know what I mean," George breathes. "It takes things to the next level."

Confusion isn't what threads through Dream's tone, it's not judgement either. It's the simple line between right and wrong, where he dips into each side before letting the infliction of his words fall light onto George's ears—biting his own lips raw when he knows that George wants to be the one to do it for him.

There's no red on his neck. The absence of marks has been obvious for days, and the long strokes of tan skin only seem that much more kissable when the canvas is so celestially blank. It's an addition that no one has noticed, or if they have then they haven't said a word about it, but George keeps his thoughts to himself, wondering if his lips will be the next to press red onto Dream's skin.

It makes him squirm, burning heat running to his cheeks when his vision shakes and eyes flick between Dream's hands and his neck. There's no point in waiting for a response that will matter, because George is too far into his own imagination to keep coherency in his words.

He leans up as best he can and smiles in a way he never knew he was capable of, pressing his lips to Dream and pulling away before anything can really happen. But even in the shortest of kisses, the spark that runs through George's frame is still noticeable, practically undeniable as it blinds him under constellations of simmering gold.

Dream's lips taste like nectar, his mouth like addiction—caramelised charm sitting sharp while no words are passed between the two, and it lingers for far longer than imaginable, like no matter how hard George tries to shake the feeling, he'll never be rid of Dream's presence.

Tufts of brown hair catch George's head as he falls back, shielding him from pain and giving him the heart to stare up at Dream and let the light cast shadows over his face. Perfection is fleeting and yet it's all that George can see, roses tucked tight into his grip while he tunes out the world and lets himself believe that he and Dream are the only people that really matter.

Quite possibly, George has been doing that for a while.

"You should hang out with Sapnap," Dream smiles again.

The silence isn't entirely ruined by the greened name, but George still rolls his eyes and bats away the thoughts of guilt or wrongdoing anyway, doing everything in favour of melting into the way vowels are formed and rolled—basked in sugar to make them glisten

"Are we back on this?" George laughs, turning to let amber eyes meet green. "I will."

Two bodies lie close together, pressed in sloped shapes the way lovers do, and right now they may not be official, and George may be prepared to break in seconds, possibly even less, but the guard he'd held for so long is slipping, perhaps showing a side of him that not even Sapnap has seen.

Dream is sweet and he's tender, and even when he's pressing close kisses to George's neck, never biting down but still leaving fleeting touches against his skin, George knows that things can always be better. That within a month he'll be putty in Dream's arms, so inexplicably enamoured by his every movement that trying to stay above water will only be a transient thought.

---

"Do you want to hang out this weekend?"

The phone is cold against George's ear.

"Sorry, I don't think I can," he speaks, not lying but shielding truth through the whites of his teeth, hoping that Sapnap can't reach through and take his plans from him in an instant.

It almost feels wrong—to be talking like this: in a flurry of purple and ash and all things putrid, but George is in too deep now, and if he wants to keep what he has with Dream then he needs to do this.

"Why not?" Sapnap asks, puzzle in the lacing of his words. "We don't spend time together, dude."

They do. They see each other at school, and they text all the time. It might not be constant but it should be enough, and yet for some reason Sapnap isn't taking it. He's not like Dream, he's more familiar, and he knows when George needs space, but he doesn't grant it, instead he pushes and he prods and he keeps as close as he can, hoping that George will let up.

It's obvious in his inflection, still, George doesn't pass. When he speaks, the words are clouded with honey, a stolen attribute that he can't seem to shake.

"Sorry Sap," George mutters. "I have plans."

"Yeah?" Sapnap presses. "With who?"

Only in George's imagination, could Dream be at his side, hand slung around his waist as he presses his nose against George's neck then running up to his ear and smiling against the skin. He'd feel right and he'd feel comfortable, and even if the smile Dream wears wavers at certain moments, George could still trace the laugh on a hologram, hoping that it's real even though he's painfully alone in his room, holding onto his phone and wondering if Dream's last message will say something sweet.

"It doesn't matter."

Each bone that George has, breaks. His words are cold and the intention is colder, and he knows that he said he could balance it all, but he'd much rather be spending time with Dream than Sapnap right now, he likes him more. "Another time, yeah?"

"Sure."

"George."

The line is silent, shaking. Tension is blue and George's ears hang onto what lies still in the air, impatiently awaiting Sapnap's next words and hoping they won't bring him something new, make the guilt that he doesn't hold even more prevalent.

"We're still best friends, right?"

And George has never claimed to be a good person, he's never claimed to be smart, or kind, or anything of the sort, but at a certain point, the ease in which he lies gets worrying. It becomes less effortless and more terrifying. Still, he can't bring himself to stop.

"Of course," George smiles, an actor in the play that only he wrote. "We always will be."

---

George swings his locker closed, a slam reverberating in a strain as he holds two books close to his chest and waits for the crowds to turn the corner and meet him by the doors. A single day is long and the world's presence is hard, but George has gone through the routine so many times that he really believes himself capable, even when it tests him

There's a giggle from behind him, two girls standing close and pretending they aren't staring straight in George's direction despite the fact they clearly are. The facade barely lasts two seconds, shattering in green laughs and cutting his ears with the blade that the sound holds, but George half wishes he'd never noticed, because the way the world stares at him is awful, *forte*.

The books in George's grip start to fall, any flicker of hope going with them, and Dream had promised to meet him here after second period, right when Sapnap should be making his way to chess club, but he's late, leaving George to wait in stolen time.

Embarrassment hits him in full force, the two in his peripheral never failing to look away when he thinks he's slick enough to check whether or not they're really watching. And for a moment it seems as though he'll never get the answers to unspoken questions, but hell holds determination, burning him in fire before dragging George down to the pits, so unsurprisingly, one of the girls opens her mouth and tries not to laugh as she stands tall with deep blue confidence.

"You're uh, Dream's *boyfriend*, right?" she questions, side-eyeing her friend and nearly doubling over in the process.

"Not really," He shrugs, lying while staying truthful. He doesn't even know what they are. "Why?"

Any response might hurt, leave George with cold bruises and ruined morale, but the ice he gets in exchange is far worse, far more stifling.

A shrug and a wave, harsh, biting laughs and the sound of wedged shoes scraping against a linoleum floor. It's not pleasant, and George can't understand the draft, but there's nothing he can do to stop a high voice from laughing shrill, before disappearing down winding hallways.

"Nothing." It's like mockery. "Good luck with that."

---

The safety of George's house can only last for so long.

Each night is repetitive, darkness blurring and turmoil rolling. And Dream holds George with worry, as though he's afraid that if he squeezes too hard then he'll break.

"You know," Dream mumbles one night, staring at George while sitting slumped against the frame of his bed, tone so soft and eyes already molten. "I didn't think I'd like you this much."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing." It's the stone answer that George hates, this time wrapped in amber to give it a golden shine. "Just, I like hanging out with you."

In some ways, it's the confirmation that George has needed—emotion being served on a silver platter for him to pick at until each strand is perfect, and Dream makes sure it's all backed up by holding George close and wrapping an arm around his waist.

Their legs are touching, bodies close, and from the edge of George's desk the credits to an awful movie blare in trembling grey detail. It's not how George had imagined it, but these "date" nights are the one real thing he looks forward to, especially when conversation with Sapnap feels forced and the will to invite the other out, diminishes.

One bad phrase can't make George stay away from Dream, and although public opinion on the pair is yet to fully be fleshed out, there's no doubt that it'd be negative, ill-mannered. Because Dream does want to do these things with George, it's clear in the way that he speaks and the angle that he smiles, Dream wants this just as much as George does, maybe even more.

It's a scary thought, but George is long past fear. He's learnt to love the danger, even when a simple movie night feels as though they're hiding something inescapable. The corners of his lips are disloyal, tugging up when he tries to keep himself calm, and although he won't stand tall and proclaim it for the vultures to pick apart, for once George lets himself be honest, human.

"I like you too, idiot," he pokes, leaning further into Dream's space to tilt his head up and face him. "I'm really glad I met you."

"Yeah?" Dream cuts, charmed. "Why?" One hand cups George's jaw, gentle before guiding him into bliss, all shaped with closed eyes and silken sugar lips. "It's not my brains, is it?"

"Shut up," George scoffs. "You're just using me for my kisses anyway."

It's pink and it's beautiful, and there's no way on earth that George will let it fall.

He holds a bow in his hands and he strings an arrow with precise fingers, all with a renaissance smile and orange on the shadows of milk skin. Overseas, Dream picks up his target, a pearl necklace over his chest that he breaks and dangles in the other's direction, just to tease him. And as he draws the feathers back, George lets his nail catch on the bone of his arrow, releasing it far too quick just for it to hit target immediately—dragging blood from Dream's heart as he plucks the weapon from its end.

"You're an idiot." A sugar smile, Dream speaking so quietly that it's a miracle for George to have found coherence within the tone.

"Let's put on another movie," George suggests.

"Sure, what do you want to watch?" Dream asks, pouting when George shuffles forwards to press



cold fingers against his keypad. “*Hey.*”

“I’m not sure.” George tunes it all out. “Something sad.”

---

The day that George and Sapnap meet is cold.

They stand in ice for fleeting seconds, thin coats and large sweaters keeping them from falling through the floor. For a moment, George thinks it’ll be awkward, that he’s missed his shot and that Sapnap is already holding a grudge that’ll last for centuries, but when they stand, Sapnap regards George as though it’s normal, like nothing has changed at all.

“An arcade?” Is all that Sapnap questions, pulling George along with eager arms. “Why an arcade?”

In reality, Dream suggested it. He sent the text with invitation, he pointed out the fact that Sapnap has never been, and George had just let it all happen, but it’s not as though Sapnap can ever know that.

“So you can win me prizes,” George says instead.

“That’s stupid.”

It is.

“Would you rather go home?”

Conflict rests red in the lines of Sapnap’s brow, ruining face with ghastly appearance. If they were really friends then there would be no conflict on whether or not to stay, but Sapnap still seems to have difficulty with his words, scrutinising George before he speaks, almost as if he believes that he can look at him once and then unravel all of his secrets.

But his response is forthcoming, hope glowing white in the spaces that loyalty can’t fit while well deserved anger fizzles out in a pitiful flame.

“...No.”

Still, George can’t help but laugh. “Then shut up, idiot.”

Quiet fills the open air, flashing lights holding the edge of an evening as the pair make their way towards the entrance. The building is dark, but George might just find it perfect, perhaps that could be the needed thing to hide his purple expression—the one thing that’ll let him put his guard down while still keeping some class.

Sapnap opens the door, he takes the first steps and lets George wander behind, and it’s that painful reminder that with Sapnap, George feels as though he’s relying on the other for everything, that means any trace of guilt can fall and die within a few fucked-up seconds.

Sapnap presses his shoes into the carpeted floors, twisting his ankle to turn and face the other.

The arcade is as good as empty, the lights are dark, and George listens as the ground rumbles and shakes to try and throw them off balance. The few people milling about only serve to make the

tension feel more suffocating, like pale blue strings are being strung through George's fingertips and pulled until they're agonising, but they'll make their way through it, George knows they will.

It's loud and it's angry. And when the pair stand shoulder to shoulder, not far enough in to care and not close enough to the door to leave, Sapnap shows no fear and lets his words tumble before they can fall.

"Is this weird?"

George frowns. "Why would it be weird?"

"I don't know," Sapnap shrugs. "It just feels like it is."

The arcade machines are blinding, light shining through glass as it flickers in their direction, rubato. And George swears that when he looks hard enough he can see the clear outline of his reflection plastered on the plain blue right ahead. Their talk is meaningless, George doesn't know where to start and seemingly neither does Sapnap, both of them completely ruined while clinging onto that last shred of honeyed hope.

Worlessly, they move forward, passing machine before machine until it's stifling, so repetitive that George wants to be over it. One glance in Sapnap's direction tells him all he needs to know, soft pine and comfort smell as though they're souring, yellow melting to something bold when George reaps what he's sown and tries to pick up the pieces, cowering away from the other's gaze when they stand awkwardly in the middle of nowhere with a thousand things on their minds.

"When you asked me to hang out I was kind of surprised," Sapnap admits, Adam's apple bobbing as he swallows and keeps his cool. "I kind of thought that you didn't like me anymore."

"What?" George scoffs, hollow yet meaningful, like he needs to flesh the words out in his mind before he can find anything that perfectly conveys the words he actually means. "Of course I still like you, we're best friends."

*Liar.*

"I know." And Sapnap sighs like it's understandable, as though George is free to make as many mistakes as he wants. Because at the end of the day, all that matters is the fact they have each other to crawl back to. "You've just been distant lately, I thought we'd gotten over that."

It serves as a pitiful reminder for George's promises—the little lies he'd told when stating how he'd never do anything hurtful, and when they move to stand in front of a painted claw machine, the only thing that George can think to do is smile.

"Well today we can fix things," George shrugs, knowing that there's at least some truth to his words.

Perhaps he didn't want to come, make the effort to salvage something that he's already scared won't work, but they're here now, and every time that George steals a glance in Sapnap's direction, makes note of soft brown hair and pale skin, the reminder that this was the first thing he ever had here comes flooding in at full force, almost to shake George until he appreciates the thought for what it is.

Sapnap almost looks cynical. "Really?"

"Yeah." He nods, smiles, holds the repetition on pause while wondering if loyalty can ever be blue. "I'll tell you what, you can choose what we play first."

“I can choose anything?”

For some reason, Sapnap looks ecstatic at the proclamation. Bright eyes glimmer with fluorescence, darting lights in his smile when pastel canines are bared and a grin is formed. It’s practically crazy how Sapnap can be pleased by so little, the fact that just George’s presence close to his makes him happy, but in an odd sort of sense, George appreciates it. He likes having more than one person that cares.

Just to confirm Sapnap’s thought process, George nods, holding onto his hope even while it burns his palm by hanging so deliriously from between his fingers. The room is still dark but the games manage to shine, giving dimension to something that George knows needs it. And the minimal chatter from the front barely manages to ruin their conversation, instead it makes him feel more alive, less alone.

“The dance machine,” Sapnap announces. His hands are on his hips and his decision is final, still, George finds a way to disagree.

“No.”

“You said ‘anything’.”

“Anything but that.”

There is no chance that George will ever set foot on that machine, he didn’t come here to make a fool out of himself,

“I thought we were fixing things.”

Something about it feels honest, less like it’s a light-hearted comment that Sapnap makes offhandedly and more like he really means it—that George honestly owes this to him.

“I hate you.”

Two hands come to clamp down on George’s shoulders, sending a shudder through him in waves of apricot and rose, forcing vision to shake before will overtakes reason.

“Start dancing George.”

---

One night George sits on Dream’s lap as they play Minecraft. He lets his fingers splay over Dream’s, the other guiding his movements while watercolour pink lingers in the air around. It’s been a long day, George spent half of it on call with Sapnap, planning something and throwing around idle conversation just because they can, and it was far easier to slip into than George had ever imagined. Maybe it really is his fault for not trying.

Before the moon can fall, George turns to Dream with a question on his lips. Quiet in the air.

“You’re not going to break my heart, are you?”

For a reason he’ll never know, a heart picks up, rushing blood from vein to vein as it runs like pure gold, seeping from each gash that George has found and ruining dark bandages after each swipe. And George is dumb, he’s hopeful, and he’s ignorant, and he’s everything but loyal, but right now

Dream is perfect. The speck of gold in a sea of silver.

“I don’t think I’d be able to.”

---

“You stupid idiot!” Sapnap yells, seething. “I should have won that, this game is totally rigged, it’s not even fun.”

One of his hands is on the dance machine, the other is in his hair. There’s sweat on his forehead and false rage on his brow, and this may be the third time they’ve played this game today but it still hasn’t lost its novelty. It’s warm and it’s fun, simmering perfectly over a cadmium red fire. And slipping this far back into normality was never advertised as something easy, but for once George truly thinks that he can have it all.

Somehow it’s not awkward. It’s as though they’ve just had time apart, mere moments where they went their separate ways before coming back to meet in the middle. And surprisingly it works—George smiles hard, and Sapnap laughs golden, still not knowing the reason for their distance, but in hindsight, George doesn’t think he cares.

Loud and obnoxious, George’s phone dings loud from his pocket. Slender fingers reach down to try and silence it, slipping on the button when he glances back up at Sapnap’s false rage and attempts to distance himself from the person he’s hiding.

“You’re such a sore loser,” he teases, magenta lined and painstakingly cheered. “I won, *you’re* buying us dinner.”

A sigh bounces from the walls, dripping from Sapnap’s throat with an uneager groan. Disappointment is in his tone when he leans against the back of the machine, propped up by its pillars and rolling his eyes when he asks, “Are we going *already*?”

It’s dark outside, George barely noticed until now, he’s been too preoccupied with the fixing he needs to, to really care, and it’s not like Dream has no idea where he is, so the lateness to his messages is justified, necessary, but George can’t help but feel pink.

Somehow, it’s still a surprise to him, how fun it is to spend time with the people he loves, and maybe it’s just because he’s been brushing it off so much, but now that he’s here and it’s almost over, hanging out with Sapnap feels less like a chore and more like a reward, as though George can finally strip away his sins.

So shutting Sapnap down feels like a curse, makes George feel more upset than it had earlier that week. “It’s like half nine, this place is going to close soon.”

The words manage to burn the back of George’s throat, scalding him with heat and then soothing with ice. He takes in the laugh on Sapnap’s expression, replicating it without even meaning to. Maybe it doesn’t have to be the end of things, not even a new beginning, just them picking up from where they left while George learns to manage his time with secrecy.

“Fine.” Sapnap doesn’t take it to heart, instead he sees intention and tries to understand. “But I still want food.” One glance in George’s direction, that’s all it takes. “Your house?”

---

It's been roughly 4 hours and 25 minutes since George last texted Dream. Quite frankly, he's been busy, hasn't had the time, but apparently that's not a good enough excuse anymore, because even when George's phone is face down on a marble counter, it still shakes and vibrates and draws far too much attention.

"Why is your phone blowing up like that?" Sapnap questions, legs swinging as he dangles from the top of George's counter, making himself perfectly at home in a stranger's house.

George waves his hand in dismissal. "Oh it's nothing."

But Sapnap doesn't relent. With curious palms and a friendly grin, he leans forward to drape himself off of George's shoulder, unsuccessfully doing his best to catch a glimpse of the other's phone when he scoops it off of the side. "Who's messaging you?"

"No one." Right now it doesn't feel like lying, more like George is just trying to protect Sapnap's feelings.

"Aw, does Georgie have a boyfriend?"

A blush rushes to George's face, more muted than red but undeniably there. "No, oh my god." He rolls his eyes, failing to sit with any real integrity while giggling as though it's all one big joke—like Sapnap doesn't know the guy that George has been taken by. "Shut up Sapnap."

Clearly that's not the right response. George's embarrassment betrays him in shallow seconds, forcing him to scoff and shake his head in an unconvincing manner. And he knows there's no point in lying, because as long as Sapnap doesn't know *who* he's dating then things should be fine, but the fear can still conjugate in the trimmings of his mind.

Shock makes itself evident on Sapnap's features. "Wait you do?" He glances down and to the side, holding the world in his expression as realisation dawns upon him in reds. "Is that who you've been spending so much time with?"

"I don't have a boyfriend," George tries, pathetic and high pitched, but Sapnap sees right through him, pinning him with his gaze and burning fear with intensity.

"You're such a bad liar dude."

It's said with a laugh, like Sapnap doesn't care enough to be angry. And sure, confusion stays prominent on his brows, makes his eyelids droop and the corners of his lips run flat with lemon, but all in all he looks satisfied, almost grunted.

Blue is quiet. The room is turquoise.

"I'm happy for you," Sapnap notes, with a distant gaze but a satisfied smile. It's not condescending and it's not meant to hurt, however George still finds his heart trying to betray him with its speed.

"Really?"

Sapnap nods like it's obvious, hands shaking with something hidden when he turns his gaze to George's, lip between his teeth and mouth slightly ajar. "Of course I am." He lets his head hang low. "I mean it hurts that you didn't think you could tell me, but I'm glad you have people that care about you." It's not the end so George waits, panicked and stressed but forcing himself to be

patient. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Oh.” It’s a question he had to anticipate, still he doesn’t seem to have an answer. “It’s complicated.” George plays with his shirt, shrugging when he thinks of pink lips on his and the comfort that’s spoken against his ear when he’s cold. “He’s private.”

Sapnap doesn’t question it though—he nods and he smiles, accepting that George can have secrets and not holding a grudge for the decisions he makes—the way good people do. “Okay.”

But that’s not what George deserves. It makes his skin crawl, the way that Sapnap will treat him when George is fully prepared to throw it all away again and again. And right now they’re friends, nothing more nothing less, but it’s maintainable, like this they could last. Maybe even go back to the way they used to be.

“Calm down, I can hear you stressing from here,” Sapnap soothes, “I’m not going to grill you about him.” He’s all that George can ever ask for, completely misreading a situation while keeping the intent of it all. “But if he hurts you, my dad owns a gun.”

George scoffs, one hand pushing the other back while he chokes on his laugh. “Sapnap!”

“Too far?”

Huffing, George spins on his heel, maraschino cherries swiped over his lips as he grins wide and doesn’t have to hide it. He throws his phone onto the couch, not caring for where it lands as he grabs a take-out menu from underneath a ruffled pillow to throw straight in Sapnap’s direction.

“Are you buying me dinner or what?”

Sapnap sits back, gaze never trembling under calm seas. He catches the menu with a palm against his chest, letting out a soft laugh when George pushes into his space and shoves him back with no real force.

“If I have to,” he sighs.

Although the day is long, and George still holds his secrets with no regard for who they hurt, they had fun today, and that’s all that really matters. It’s far easier to focus on one thing and tune out everything else, but that’s not enjoyable, that’s not *real*. So in the end it might be bad, and it’s surely hard to lead a double life, but at the very least, George owes it to Sapnap to try.

He can’t throw everything down the drain just to please a boy.

---

That night George falls asleep in the comfort of his own bed, his phone on vibrate by his table and arms crossed around the pillow he keeps close to his chest. There’s a message from Sapnap that he hasn’t opened, a goodnight text from Dream that he’s already answered. And peace has never been easy so even at the softest times George has always found comfort difficult, but this night is different.

It’s soft, and it’s simple, and George doesn’t think that things can get better than this.

comments/kudos are so extremely appreciated and really make my day, i do my best to respond when i can + they're the best motivation :] <333

Tysm for reading ! and ty to [flame](#) *again* for beta-ing, here's a link to their stuff !!

I'm really sorry about how long this took, I've been really busy and writing was slightly hard at the start but I'm glad I've been able to get this out, and I hope this chapter makes up for the wait.

Some people have been asking about my update schedule too, and i wanted to say that i don't *really* have one, i write when i can, and i try to post, again, when i can, but im not abandoning this, people have asked. I'll finish this fic dw, just getting constantly asked to update or when the next chapter will come out makes things more stressful, so please don't!

Also i've seen a lot of people commenting on my use of colour which i think is really nice to see because imagery hasn't always been my strong point so i'm glad people see and like the use here.

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[My twitter](#) !! come interact with me :]

# Chapter 7

## Chapter Summary

It's just how the world works, George has been forcing himself to understand that for what feels like eons. He can't understand Sapnap's emotions the same as he can barely understand his own. But this isn't going to be ruining for them. It may be one step forwards and three steps back, but eventually they'll take a leap and land, not needing to throw anything away because it can still be the second best thing in both of their lives.

## Chapter Notes

reminder that this fic is rated E for a reason, read your tags guys <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### **Signs of a good relationship:**

1. Both you and your partner make the relationship top priority. There is no doubt that you are the most important part of each other's lives.
2. You can communicate openly and regularly; you're able to have emotional intimacy (and/or physical when need be) and talking about both your personal relationship and relations with others doesn't make a conversation strained or difficult.
3. You spend time together. You prefer to spend quality time with each other and can enjoy the others' presence.
4. You can have sexual intimacy. If in a sexual relationship, you are both comfortable with what the other does and can work for the other's pleasure, being able to voice what you need and how frequently you want it..

Dream and George have been dating for three weeks, and somehow, George is still a virgin.

It's not a problem, of course it's not, but it's surprising, or at least it is to George. Because a part of him thought he had it all figured out, exactly what he wants and where he wants it—how to balance an unparalleled fling with a perfected friendship. But no part of him thought it'd last this long, that he and Dream would be moving at a relatively normal pace and enjoying every single second.

Dream makes him feel normal, listened to, and to an extent so does Sapnap, but why have one when he can have both? Keep golden strings attached to each character and pull on either when opportunity strikes. So it's almost normal, enough to make George smile as he thinks of things that he thought he couldn't while pressing a pen to blank paper.

There's a nagging hook in George's chest that still wants more despite the situation. He wants the rushed firsts and the family greetings that he'd get in any other relationship, even though he knows it's not possible—especially with the way they've been sneaking around to avoid suspicion. But he can want and want, and George's own personal needs will swell until they're all he can think of,



consuming and pink and chewing out his every thought.

Dream could be rough with him. When they kiss he already is. He makes sure to hold onto George's waist, bite against his lips and keep him pleading for something more, for a hand to slip down further and touch him in the way he wants. But there's the softer side of Dream that George has learned to take too. When he's quiet and he's clingy, and he barely gives George the chance to breathe because of the way he presses his lips against the other's, holding cool metal between them with no self interest in mind.

Shaking the thought is difficult, especially when it's already tangled through the brittle veins of George's mind, and blushing to himself is silly too but George does it anyway, head tilted to one side as he rests on his hand, shamefaced.

He sees Dream almost every day. They go out and they hold hands in secret, and somehow Sapnap doesn't know, even if the rest of the student body seems to. And although they haven't exactly had sex, they're still strong. Or at least they are in George's opinion.

Perfect might not be the right word, but every second that George has spent with Dream has felt right. Simply because of the way he speaks and how he stands, and how he never bothers to treat George as though he's made of glass. He gives him the strength to do something that Sapnap might not like.

The pen between George's fingers gets pushed between his lips, hiding a smile that's only really visible to the walls around. And his phone shakes where it sits face down on his desk right next to his books, holding a message that George knows he doesn't have the time to read, whether it's from Dream or Sapnap, or even both.

Because at the end of the day, he still has exams and he still has classes, and the two of them can wait while he studies for an hour. That is, if they have any patience.

A tap on the window makes George's senses stir.

It's quiet and it's loud and at first George thinks to ignore it, but that's before it happens again and again, and there's no doubt that it's intentional. A loose smile lines his lips when he pulls the pen from between his teeth and slams it down on the crowded desk, an arch in his hands when George moves to his window and tries not to grin, rolling his eyes when he pulls up the glass and pokes his head out.

"What are you doing?" He all-but shouts, staring down at the hooded Dream that stands straight on the grass below, a handful of pebbles in one hand and an open gesture in the other.

Annoyance is forced as it drips from George's tone, surely radiating from the neighbours too as they watch the scene go on, and it's hard to actually look irate when Dream looks so pretty under the night sky, but George does it nonetheless. Because if he doesn't then Dream will think it's okay to interrupt George's days by throwing things at his window.

"It's romantic," Dream laughs as though it explains it all.

"It's property damage," George deadpans. "And we have a perfectly functioning doorbell."

Dream's smile is almost audible. It's the late nights where George thinks he can see each golden painted freckle even from a mile away, nights where the stars stand bright and Dream is the only one under them, when George realises his fondness for the other. It's all messy, and he's had the same thought a thousand times over, but it doesn't stop him from laughing low when Dream blows

air from between his lips and huffs without real malice.

“Why do you hate romance, George?” Dream groans, honey in the grates of his tone. He says it like he knows George is being stubborn, that right now this is where he's meant to be, despite the fact that it's almost 11pm on a Friday evening and George has more important things to do than cater to Dream's selfish tendencies.

“I don't,” he argues, fruitless; one hand on the windowsill and the other raking through the browns of his hair, tugging on dark strands and pretending he doesn't see how Dream watches the movement. “Wait there.”

Slam.

George's feet carry him down the stairs, far more eager than he should be and far quicker than he'd imagined, but before he knows it he's letting Dream in—dragging him out of the dark and into the warmth with two hands. Painted nails rake over George's arms, pushing up his skin and dragging heat across in pink traces.

There's a smile on Dream's lips, something open in his eyes when he leans down to press his lips to the tip of George's nose and wrap his arms around his waist, pulling them close so their chests touch and there's nothing to really run from. It's under George's eyes and it's behind his grin, the heat of confusion. And he's never been the best at expressing those things so instead he leans away, feeling Dream's hands sit on the low of his back while he taps a hand against his chest and raises a brow.

“Idiot,” he states, and tugs on the strings of Dream's hood. “My parents are here.”

“You weren't answering your phone,” Dream shrugs.

His hands are cold, teasing the hem of George's shirt as they threaten to push their way up and under the material. In the comfort of blacks and blues he looks boyish, almost embarrassed with red hues when George pulls an unamused face—acting as though he isn't falling for the charm that dark piercings hold when they tug up against Dream's shyest smile.

It's mindless infatuation. George's fingers cool when they curl around a silver necklace, keeping Dream's head low as he maintains defiance.

“I was studying.”

Dream doesn't dignify the words with a response. He stands sheepishly. George wants to kiss him.

There's a moment in the night where the skies get darker, run from orange to black and push out sunlight in favour of the shadows that can hold each other against the walls. And although George has never been one to stay up and go out in the midst of death, he at least likes spending the lone hours with others, certainly with Dream.

They both know where they're going, there's no reason for George to try and pretend he doesn't want Dream to follow him up to his room. So instead of showing intrigue, George greets Dream for a second time with a turned back and outstretched hands, letting Dream hold onto him still while he walks away, simply because he knows that it's one of *those* nights.

Floorboards creak when they stumble, unfamiliar with the way each panel is meant to move even though they should know everything there is. In a sea of darkness they walk with moonlight falling on each step, open windows letting in the stifled air despite the safety that it lacks. Dream keeps George in close proximity even though it's only the two of them there.

Perhaps it's to keep George in comfort, maybe it's actually so Dream can feel the same way. But no matter the reason, George enjoys it, enjoys it and never wants to feel Dream's grip fall.

The pattern of familiarity is needed. Hands remain tangled while they cross and George hits a door with his back, eyes burned on the way Dream's eyes drag up as if he hasn't really been looking at the way forward.

"Eyes up here," George corrects gently, when aventurine drops lower and attention is lost.

"Sorry."

Behind the lights of George's eyes, a thought flickers and fizzles out, dark and tender while Dream steps further into his space to crowd him against the wooden door. The ability to lie low seems impossible to him; even when it's too quiet outside to use inside voices and the room across the hall is full, Dream keeps his presence high and poised, never breaking just so George can see him grin.

"I was thinking about getting a tongue piercing, you know?" The words have intent, meaning. They fall red on the ground wrapped in lust and sugar sweet punctuation.

George doesn't want to humour it, he really doesn't. By now he knows how Dream's brain works, the way he tries to keep the attention on him even when he knows George has bigger things to attend, but beside himself, he inclines his chin, one hand on the door to pull them through while Dreams teeth poke out with ivory fangs and another question is raised.

"Really?"

"Yeah." Dream slides a hand up George's side, one glance to the left and then one to the right to find his surroundings while George's bed is still made and his desk is the thing in disarray. "I think you'd like it."

"Why?" George asks before he thinks. And the only response he gets is in the form of arms around his waist, pulling his hips flush to Dream's while they twirl in the safety of George's room—door barely having swung shut behind them when Dream wiggles his eyebrows and lets his tongue trace over the whites of his teeth, maybe strained, maybe forced, but still managing to make George swoon. "You're an idiot."

Dream's laugh is hypnotic. It catches sparks and gets pushed against George's neck when he dips low and meets the junction between his shoulder and the stretch of marrow skin above. And at first it's just one kiss that's held chaste against the slope, but soon it turns to two as Dream drags his lips up and never pulls away, holding George as though he's the only lifeline that he'll ever need.

Slow-painted fingers tangle in sandy hair—nails quite possibly sharp enough to graze over Dream's scalp when he pulls at the strands and watches Dream's head loll to one side. "No I like these one's," George poses, using the leverage he has to tug Dream forward and press his lips against one piercing. A simple reminder that he can play too, that Dream isn't the only one with something to scrutinize.

"I could tell you that," Dream mumbles, nose scrunching up when George taps it lightly. "Always staring."

There's silence and there's patience, blue running calm in small lines that George can't reach out and hold. And although the silence is admirable, and Dream helps him hold it hand in hand with safety, George has things that need to be done, and the contact needs to be broken at some point.

“I need to study,” he chastises, an edge to his tone that he doesn’t really mean, it’s just enough for him to seem authoritative. But when he drops his hand from Dream’s hair it only comes back, guided by the other to stop him from really leaving.

“Okay,” Dream utters, holding fondness in his tone while it lines his eyes too.

“I can’t do that when you’re hanging off of me.”

A shrug is all he gets. “I like being close to you.”

“You’re so close you’re going to mould into me.”

“I’m fine with that,” Dream says, still holding on when George moves back to his desk and the grasp falls from his hair. “Go back to studying, you won’t even know I’m here.”

The way his grin sits stagnant tells a completely different story.

“It’s late,” George tuts, not managing to sit down on his own because of the way Dream takes his spot, pulling him back against his chest in a chair that’s only meant for one. It’s too close for a friendship, too normal for anything special, but George enjoys the touch and he likes the attention, and Dream gives him everything he’s ever wanted with chivalry and concern and enough sugar to melt the tongue.

“So if you fall asleep I’ll carry you over to bed.” Dream pulls George back, away from reality and the papers that lay on his desk, while making sure to kiss right behind his ear, where he knows it’ll tickle and where he knows it’ll make George laugh. Just so there’ll be that perfect almost-silence that they’ve both been vying for for far too long.

In the most bitter moments, Dream knows the right things to say. He persuades the feeling of wrong that George has felt from the beginning dissipate with stardust and those caramelized seconds, never to be seen again but always having that store in the back of his mind, permanent.

“Fine,” George breathes, weak despite prowess—a single pen falling from between his fingers every time he picks it up and feels a warm breath on the back of his neck.

He barely touches paper, gets a single word down before his attention is being dragged away once again. Of course it’s petty to pretend to be annoyed when all Dream wants is attention, but George really does have things to do and he can’t just change his schedule completely because someone else turned up.

“Are you sure you need to study?” Dream’s tone tells all. There’s need in his vowels and pink in his mumbling, his legs pushed apart to try and make room for George to sit between them. In his hands he holds tension, letting it roll over George’s body too when he pushes his palms down and plucks the pen from George’s grip, almost quiet enough for him to not notice.

Absentminded closeness means that Dream never really lets go. When George mutters “yes” and his eyes do their best to run over the words he’s already written, Dream sits, having taken George’s right hand hostage—pressing shapes into his palm with the tips of calloused fingers.

It’s not the night he thought he’d have, in fact, a month ago the idea would have been ludicrous, but George embraces the thought and lets the feeling of Dream’s cheek touching his stop him from fretting, perhaps going back on the way he’s convinced himself that it’s all fine.

He half wonders how things would be if Dream and Sapnap weren’t related. If there’d still be something that meant they weren’t allowed to touch. If this is how it’s always been in every

universe, at every time, throughout each millennia.

Dream plays with his fingers while George reads, and if he doesn't actually get any work done, then he doesn't want to talk about it.

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“Hello?”

The phone rings loud on a crisp morning. George's hand moves before his brain, drifting to one side to stop the noise while Dream presses closer to him in false slumber.

He doesn't know how they ended up in bed or what time they dozed off, but he knows he's comfortable—living peacefully with his legs tangled around Dream's and his torso covered by another. There's perfect pink being pressed against his skin by large hands, the same hands that somehow found their way up the bottom of his shirt and spent enough time there to become warm.

Dream is shirtless. It's quite possibly the first thing that George notices, second maybe to the way his phone shakes on the counter to his side. The sight is something he's seen before and he'll undoubtedly see it again, but no amount of time will stop him from being wordless at the sight, enthralled by the simpler things.

Comfort is overshadowed by a single yell.

“George!” Sappnap enthuses, too loud for the time and too happy for the world. It's no surprise that the words are loud enough for Dream to hear, even when the phone volume is down to almost nothing and the screen is pressed flat against George's ear, because it's a recognisable voice and they're both shameful enough to be tense—even when Sappnap doesn't say anything hurtful. “My parents aren't home, do you want to come over?”

“Now?” George mumbles, shaking sleep from his tone. He gives half a glance to Dream, trying to be met with confirmation but only really getting a tired grumble.

“Yes,” Sappnap confirms, “I'm bored and I want to hang out.”

It's as though Dream hears the words through fire. His hand slides out from George's shirt to hold the slither of skin that shows underneath, the part that rests above his trousers and is already mounted to the shapes of his fingerprints. The snake bites that he didn't take out then press to the crook of George's neck, effectively taking his attention from the call with small movements.

“Maybe not right now,” George chokes. He can feel Dream's mouth fall open, his tongue lap over his skin as his teeth scrape over the open space, and now isn't the time to get excited, not when he's lying under Dream, and not ever when he's on call with Sappnap. A yawn is forced, loud enough to make George seem collected. “I'm tired.”

“Fine, come over later though,” Sappnap bargains, believing every word because why would George lie? “We can order pizza.”

Dream's tongue is addictive; it works against George's skin like it's making a mockery of everyone else, and it's all tongue and it's all teeth, and his lips move with the metal between them to make George gasp. “Okay,” he tries to say, spare hand flying to grab the hairs on the back of Dream's head to pull him off, just for a second to let him clear his mind. “Just leave the door

open.”

There’s no real problem with the change, it’s not as though George had any actual plans that day. And even if he did, he needs to make time for his friends. Those chemical thoughts have been pushed so much that it’s all he’s trying to do now, because there’s only two things to value, and balancing both is easier than expected.

George has no semblance of control when he talks, and the presence that lingers around him is safety itself—like warmth and cascading yellows, the constellations in George’s periphery only serving to make the arch to Dream’s back that much more present.

It’s not a competition but Dream makes it seem like one.

“Already is,” Sapnap says.

Dream needs to prove his presence is more important.

He doesn’t have to physically pry the phone out of George’s grip when it falls from his hand so quickly, a loose hold only getting looser with the way that Dream kisses that sweet spot at the very top of his neck and smiles. It’s nothing short of defeat, how George melts into the touch and does his best to slam the hang up button before he can’t force a filter between his lips anymore.

But when he looks at Dream and sees that grin he can’t really be mad, because it’s almost sweet—the way he needs to be the better brother, and George can never be too angry at a one sided competition that revolves around his attention.

“Fuck you,” he bites, laughing through those words.

There’s breathless permission, rose coloured glasses shielding his view as Dream ignores secrets and mouths at George’s neck once again, dragging pleasure in golden strings when he squirms and gasps and tries not to let his state show.

“Pretty,” Dream whispers, smothering George with himself and his like.

On the earliest of mornings, Dream’s tone is weighed down by gravel. For the most part, he’s quiet, only choosing to answer the questions he finds most important, on the other hand he’s rambling, pointing out the most obvious things because he isn’t quite sure of what else to say.

Right now, George should be berating him, telling him exactly why stunts like that aren’t safe or carry chary, but he can’t find the right words and he doesn’t really want to—Dream has no ill intent.

“You can’t do that,” he says eventually, sweet and calm, and trailing off when Dream gives him one last kiss.

“Why not?” He sounds genuinely confused, words alight and kindling a flame when the gears in his head turn and turn. The lower half of his body presses down, a slight movement brushing against George’s everything, and it’s obvious for the reasoning but George can still pretend to hold modesty. “Oh,” Dream chuckles, low and dark and sitting with silken honey. “Are you hard?”

The blush is furious. It sits in patches and runs carmine and pink upon the heights of his cheeks, and even if George can’t see it, he can feel it, from the top of his chest to the palms of his hands. Red. Red. Red.

Even though he knows the fact, Dream never pushes. The way he stares at George is almost worse,

because there's no judgement in his eyes, it's as though he completely understands that that's what his actions would do and now he's prepared to deal with the consequences.

But George is a man, and George has fear. And his body wants to fall but his mind won't let him. It's the thing he's been saying he wants and yet the mere implication makes his body tense, in arousal and in scare and in all the things he thought he was above.

"Oh my god," George groans, pushing Dream up. Up and away, shirtless and warm, holding all the traits that George thought he'd never want to let go of.

"What?" Dream asks, still smiling because that's what he always seems to do. His hoodie sits on the edge of George's bed and when he pulls it on it's almost painful, black material covering each stretch of skin as he stands to one side and keeps his head up high, teasing.

There's a tension in the air. Not the red kind that they're so used to, but the kind that's wrapped in orange, the kind that makes George's gaze stay on Dream's chest even while it's slowly covered up, a feeling between his legs that he can't quite shake. "Go home, idiot," he muses, when Dream doesn't seem to do anything.

Ivory teeth drag that pink lip through the ringier. Dream's fucking him with his eyes and George knows exactly why, how he must look in the clothes he slept in with the indents that Dream has definitely left. If he had more sense then he would be telling him off, but he enjoys the look too much, the way it makes him feel wanted.

"Are you sure?" Dream asks, gentle, just to juxtapose the blacks in his eyes.

He's not being too forward but it's enough to make George squirm, have his legs moving like jelly when Dream gives him one last look and keeps it dark. It's acidic and it burns, and George needs to keep the curl to his lips down before it's branded to his expression permanently. But it's so much easier said than done, and before he knows it he's throwing a pillow in Dream's direction and giggling to himself when it hits his chin.

"You know where the keys are," George laughs, rolling onto his stomach. "Lock the door on your way out."

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The first thing that George notices that day is how Sapnap's eyes won't stop shrinking.

It's not an astute observation, nothing for him to be proud of, but it's still not a normal occurrence for Sapnap's eyes to sit so narrowed and for his smile to seem so forced.

"Hey," he first mutters, closing the door with his foot and throwing himself onto the couch next to his friend. "You look angry."

There's no distance between them, George makes sure of it. Both physically and mentally he makes sure Sapnap is close just so he doesn't feel like he's holding a secret, because a distraction is far bigger than a degree, and George knows he'll never live up to either expectation.

"I'm not," Sapnap dismisses, a liar, clear as day.

Perhaps it's odd—for George to take the initiative and push in the way that Sapnap does best, but

there's almost an irony in the way Sapnap mopes and there's nothing that stops George from tearing the parallels apart. Yellow lines his view as he tilts his head to one side and questions the other with the fewest words, holding dandelions and daisies and ripping out each petal as though they're thorns.

It's only necessary for Sapnap to shake him off, make George keep prodding and prodding until he's found the answer, but George isn't like that, and he'll ask once and once only, because he trusts Sapnap to tell him the things that really matter even if he doesn't have the same courtesy.

"It's family stuff," Sapnap says, dismissal again and again, either for a lack of trust or the knowledge that George doesn't need the burden of his problems. "Doesn't really matter."

The smiles are short and George tugs his sleeves down on his hands to feel better. Nothing in the room feels warm, despite the fact that George pretends it does, but he's in no position to be annoyed, his own lies are far more obvious. "Okay," he mumbles, quiet and maybe reserved, not enough for anyone to care—although George already knows Sapnap does.

A beep makes them both start, the noise running from George's phone where it shakes in his pocket. There's no use pretending he doesn't know who it's from, it's Dream, checking up on him in the way he always does. Just because he's that good of a person. Both Dream and Sapnap are the pinnacle of mind and George doesn't deserve either of them.

"Cool pants." There's something sceptical in Sapnap's eyes. "Are they new?"

They aren't, they're Dream's, having been left on George's floor from a different time he came over and the two of them had nothing better to do than sleep. In a short nervous breath, George nods, refusing to let viridian paint its picture in his mind once again. "Yeah."

"They look nice."

The difference between sincerity and sin is too close to be distinguishable, different. George brings his legs up to his chest and lets them cross under his body, putting meagre distance between himself and Sapnap so he can let the feeling simmer. In his pocket, on his leg, his phone shakes once more. It's easier for George to ignore it and for Sapnap to scroll on the TV by holding the remote tight—perhaps then they'll stop jumping from strained to natural.

"What are we doing?" George asks, quiet, reserved, definitely sitting on a whim and hoping that Sapnap doesn't read too far into his words.

"Ordering food." A grin. "I'm hungry."

Every time they hang out it seems like their plans are the same. It's neither of their faults, Sapnap offers suggestions, George refuses them all, because even if he's trying he doesn't instantly want to start new hobbies or buy memberships to places he'll never visit again. But one day he will—give him a few days or a week, or even just a conversation with Dream, and George will be the person that can make Sapnap happy too.

"We can watch something too," Sapnap suggests. "Maybe go out later."

There are words in the air that George can't quite catch. "Sure."

One last notification sets them alight.

"Dude." For the first time in a while, Sapnap sounds angered. His tone drops low and his eyes fall from George's eyes, to his neck, to his phone. The hickey in red that George had forgotten and the



machine attached that carries a thousand secrets. “Can you put your phone on silent?”

“Yeah,” George humbles, “Sorry.”

The way green swirls the air is mocking. The corners of Sapnap’s tone sit with him, as sharp as they started right to the very end, all confusion, all hurtful. All George can do is sit, he barely knows what he’s thinking, or even why he feels slightly wrong, because they were over this, they fixed it, and this time it feels as though it’s completely out of George’s control, as though he’s not the one in the wrong here, like it’s Sapnap that’s keeping something drastic.

The reminders of the morning sit in pink on George’s neck, mulberry bite marks and pomegranate stains lining his skin even when he tried to cover up with a shirt that’s bigger than one he’d normally wear. In reality, it’s not that big of a mark, Dream’s been branded with far worse and George most likely has too at one point, but with the mystery of another, and the poorly concealed traction on Sapnap’s features, George can’t help but wish he’d made more of an effort to cover up.

They order food, pizza. Sapnap chooses one half, George picks the other. At the very least, they can still compromise on the things that don’t really matter.

As usual, Sapnap pays, refusing to let George even get his wallet out, and it should feel bad but George is so used to the gesture that he can’t feel anything.

There’s the crack of dawn on Sapnap’s shadow when he gets up to answer the door, a drawing like stress or an etching like pain, and for a moment George isn’t sure of his surroundings or the fact that this is something he needs to see, but he stays anyway because that’s what he owes the other, dedication.

A jaw trembles, it isn’t George’s.

Like all humans, George is a creature of habit. With slender fingers he reaches into his pocket and pulls out his phone, half a glance to Sapnap and a full glance back. The sun is falling and George can feel the light go with it; blue is fleeting and orange turns yellow, and it’s like a relationship goes under while there’s no real explanation for either of their actions.

It’s just how the world works, George has been forcing himself to understand that for what feels like eons. He can’t understand Sapnap’s emotions the same as he can barely understand his own. But this isn’t going to be ruining for them. It may be one step forwards and three steps back, but eventually they’ll take a leap and land, not needing to throw anything away because it can still be the second best thing in both of their lives.

Messages filter through quietly. George texts Dream back with a smile on his face, crimson red lips stained by the way he’s rubbed carmine over them and refused to wash it off. There’s a cough to his side, mouth opening with hesitation as the words spin and the regret becomes evident before any sound hits the air.

It’s an awful long way to the end of existence, but it seems as though Sapnap wants to get there earlier, because as the day gets longer he tries to drag out the seconds for all their worth—filling them with strain and ice and letting discomfort bubble in blue.

“Is that your boyfriend?” It’s the first time that George has heard venom be so green.

He closes his eyes. This is normal. He just needs to believe himself.

“Yes.”

After silence there's a clearing. George follows the light and Sapnap does too.

"Okay."

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They watch a film in partial quiet, food going cold after a while because they left it for so long and neither dared to move to take another piece. The way that Sapnap pretends that everything is fine is almost laughable, he acts like a mirror and keeps a reddened smile on his lips to push away the reality that is the abyss. It's not George's place to be angry though, so for the whole time he keeps his phone face down and flat and tries to pretend it's actually his fault that they're like this.

Because if it was then at least he'd be the one in control.

There's a creak to the front door a few hours later, Sapnap trying and failing to hide the way he goes still and shoots daggers at the archway near the entrance. Throughout it all, George keeps his head forward, biting his lip until it shifts to purple and he can taste metal on the tip of his tongue.

"Hey," honey calls, clumsy tone and oblivious smile. And it's the only tone that George knows can't be faked, because it's familiar and it's sweet and it shouldn't shine over Sapnap's agitation but it does, almost letting him forget where he is. "You guys got food?"

No answer. Perhaps Sapnap didn't hear.

"Yeah," George says instead. He has to pretend not to notice the glance that Dream throws in his direction—the one of boldness and want, an almost smirk that just tugs on the corners of his lips and makes him that much more irresistible.

For a guilty pleasure, Dream is flawless—still in the clothes he was wearing earlier and still managing to toe the line between right and wrong, even his gaze magnetizing. Cornered off, sitting to one side, Sapnap doesn't seem to find the same amusement in Dream's actions. It's almost like he's ignoring him completely, barely wanting to acknowledge his existence in favour of staring at the screen ahead.

"Sap," Dream calls, playing with fire like it's nothing more than a game—something for him to win by just staring stronger and pretending he's never been weak. "Pass me some."

Unfortunately it doesn't work. Pain is the wrong way to describe it, it's less harrowing than pain, the way Sapnap looks at Dream is more subdued, like shallow frustration, rimmed with vermillion and painted with white.

"Get it yourself."

Out of courtesy, George stays out of it, wishing to bury himself into the ground so he doesn't have to hear the sharpened tones again.

"Just pass it over."

Ushering and quiet and *god*, George hates this.

It's not an actual battle but it's just as uneasy. There's a fleeting moment of wonder, a pause where George hopes that either brother can hear his discomfort so they can keep the melodrama for later,

but obviously that doesn't happen, obviously that'd be too easy.

"Order your own pizza if you want it that bad," Sapnap says, rolling his eyes even though no one's paying enough attention to care. Arms fold up and the clawing of thoughts run again, this time being stopped by George's quiet rather than caused, purple.

"Ever heard of sharing?" Dream questions, joking of course but there's still enough time for tension to fester.

He's not radiating pink, it's a factor that George can't not pick up on. The orange that usually draws rings around Sapnap is barely present either, like they're both different people in front of each other even though they were perfectly fine the week before.

"Fuck off, Dream," Sapnap bites.

Existing between the two of them is like being cemented in ice, there's nowhere to run and nowhere to hide and the cushions on the couch aren't endless enough to hide behind, he just has to live.

"George, pass me a slice," Dream says, flinching under George's death glare. "Sapnap's being weird."

"Don't bring him into it," Sapnap flares.

Sheer confusion makes Dream's eyebrows furrow. "I'm just talking to him."

"No, you're not."

Patience falls in golden strings, and there's only so much of it that George can handle. He likes being around Dream and he likes being around Sapnap, but together it's awful because for some reason it seems as though all three of them are holding secrets and George is only in on one of them.

"Are you guys okay?" He asks, not because he wants to know but because he doesn't want to be there if they aren't. From Sapnap he gets nothing, from Dream he gets concern. All in all, he doesn't like it. "Sorry."

"Sapnap, do we need to talk?" Dream questions. All things considered, he's being cautious, asking the question slowly as to not press harder than he should. And it's not fully right for George to pick up on it, but right now he knows Dream and Sapnap's inner workings as though they're his own, and all it's really doing is driving him to the edge.

"I don't know?" Sapnap's angry, George knows him. "Is there something you need to tell me?"

"I feel like you aren't just talking about the pizza," Dream chuckles, George pretends he doesn't find it funny too.

"Can you leave?" Sapnap groans. "We were having fun before you arrived."

It's the first time that Dream's expression tightens, black snake bites being played with by the sharpest of teeth as a grin turns into a grimace and that chiselled look gets hacked at until it falls. "Are you sure?" He asks, steady, collected. "I'm sure you'd *both* really enjoy my company."

Fire burns red behind the blacks of Sapnap's eyes. It's as though he enjoys the feeling of fear that he stirs, the way he plays with power and pushes Dream out, because if everything was the way it

should be then George wouldn't enjoy Dream's company in the way he does.

A single cherry syllable, bitter and rotten and definitely not comforting. "Leave."

"And if I don't?" Dream stands taller if that's even possible. He's barely in the room and yet it still feels like he's taking up all of the space, slowly pushing Sapnap out of frame while George lies frozen on the couch.

It doesn't feel good, in fact George would rather be anywhere else. Pitchforks are raised and someone's being hunted down, and he knows that he's done bad things before but this was not how it was meant to go. How is he supposed to live with himself when he's bouncing from brother to brother without one of them even knowing? In fact, spilling the secret would probably just make Sapnap start hating him too, why even bother? Why not run and hide and hope the two sort their shit out before they drag George down too?

"I'm going home," George announces, not letting their hurried glances change his mind when he stands up and grabs his things.

"What?" Both from Dream and Sapnap, both confused.

"You guys are being weird," he shrugs, like it's just that, not that he feels as though they'll ruin him. Umber eyes flick over to viridian, Dream's sorry smile managing to brighten a dampening day. "I'll see you later Sapnap."

Upset sits in Sapnap's voice, a hysterical grave, "Don't go."

"Don't drag me into your stupid sibling shit," George beams, one hand on the wall and the other on his stomach. "I'll be on Discord later, okay?"

No time for a response, the time where George wished he could stay for eternity slipping away as he's shown the things he never knew and realises he's *never* going to know everything, no matter how close he'll be to the two. He doesn't want to go, maybe he wants Dream to reach forward and grab him by the wrist just to give him a goodbye kiss, but that'll never happen, they both know to be cautious around others.

In the end George walks home. In the end, George doesn't know how to feel.

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The next day they're both messaging him, almost more than usual. If George had any sort of self respect then he'd hold a grudge, but the same point stands when he remembers that it's not all about him, and that two people are allowed to argue without him feeling the need to stick his nose into it.

Morning feels long. George is shirtless in the presence of his own room, one pillow under his chin while he lies face first on his bed with only his arms acting as support beneath him. There's a chance that Sapnap will invite him over again, the only right answer is no though, because his skin feels dewy and his thoughts feel turquoise, not quite sad but when he mulls over his thoughts he can't stop. That's not the right state of mind for Sapnap's frustrations to be taken out on.

Message after message George ignores. The ones where Sapnap asks if he wants to play C.S and the ones where he's wondering if he wants to go get lunch. And to an extent he feels bad, but it's

not as though he's ignoring him out of wrongdoing this time, he's doing it so that Sapnap has time to cool off, time to feel better.

It'd feel worse if he was just ignoring Sapnap, no, he's not answering Dream either.

(But that's more out of respect than because he wants to).

A single day George can take for himself, one where he can sit and he can be selfish with the clothes that he wore to sleep and a blanket that he's used to sharing. The chair by his desk has been moulded to fit two bodies, George still manages to slip into his place as though they're both there. He's comfortable in shorts and the stretch of white fabric on his torso, and when he sticks to the back of his chair he peels himself away with a sigh, feeling far too hot in the smallest of rooms.

He's pink, glowing maybe, and it's a sin that no ones there to see it, but the darkness of a monitor acts as good as a mirror and George is fine with being the one to stare at his own appearance. Strands of brown hair don't fall perfectly into place, they drop down George's forehead and loop in little curls, gluing themselves to tacky skin and whitened patches until they're permanent.

He plays few games, gets little homework done, but all in all it's pleasant, and the absence he feels is nothing less. It's a whole day in his room, sun turning to starlight when it's all over, but there's nothing wrong with that, every once in a while the stares of the people outside don't need to be seen by George's delicate eyes.

He's always hated the view of competition. Those that truly believe they've been birthed only for greatness and are destined to live for that one true purpose. It's pathetic, wrong, and the glass that is emotion never caters for the people that think they're better than, because those people are awful, and George will never be one of them.

Sapnap isn't like that persay, but he's not normal. He doesn't think himself as a saving force but he's never going to be humble, he's far too self important for that. Still, he has some humility, when things are tough he takes the chance to talk, he'll push through George's problems and encourage him to be open, but for that same reason, he doesn't share his own intuition.

One hand pushes into George's hair, tugging the knots out of strands and combing through the ends like they're sugar paper. There's light and there's dark, and George sits in the midst of them both, nothing stopping him from starting a call with Sapnap and putting the day's nothingness behind him.

It's late at night when Dream asks to see George. He doesn't get a real warning, only a small simple message that reads *come over*, and George isn't observing enough to fault it.

He pulls on shoes, doesn't bother with a jacket, although the shorts he wears are short and his shirt is too thin to really be clothing. And even in the bitter coldness of the night, George doesn't hold a grudge—he knows Dream and these meetings are always common.

It's not anomalous to be walking in the dead air for a small encounter, George knows he'll do it every time Dream asks. And since repent is so outdated, there's nothing to do other than burn red and hope it's seen as lust and not fear.

The soles of George's shoes scuff along the winding road. He hasn't cleaned the pair in a while and he knows he needs to soon, but that won't be now—he likes them too much to wipe away the marks. The small things that don't matter are the ones that George can understand, his mind fixed to the way each step lands when he walks, shadowed.

It's cold out, still his skin feels tacky with warmth.

The way to Dream's house is engraved into George's every day routine. He's not quite sure when he started thinking about it as Dream's house rather than Sapnap's but it's a change that's happened and not one he wants to go back on, not yet at least. His walk is blue and his feelings are rushed, but soon enough he's rounding the corner onto Sapnap's road, a car in the driveway with its lights still on and a figure in the front seat.

He knocks first of course, a mess of blond hair and black attire staring back with that statuesque blank look, and George meets the gaze with happiness incarnate—only some of that glance being forced. Painted nails reach forward, the calluses of an arched hand brushing against a grey-black door handle with questionable force as it beckons George in and even twists the door for him.

It's a rush to be out of the cold and into the car. And George imagines the way his face must pale and how his nose must be bitten red when aventurine irises fall upon him and widen with impure shock.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Dream frets, dragging George over the bump between seats without the need for participation. The way he's held makes George laugh, batting at the other's chest when he's pulled to a sitting position with his back hitting the dashboard. One leg is on Dream's side and his other is bent up in a position that means they aren't truly pressed together, George leaning back to try and keep himself decent.

“Couldn't be bothered to come pick me up?” He huffs.

It's in his place that Dream's jaw angles up, as sharp as knives when he turns to one side and his fingers roam from George's waist to his own hair, tracing over yellow strands before blowing out a breath. “Didn't feel like driving.”

Under the dim lights of the car, Dream is pretty. His cheeks are red and breathing is laboured, and to George it almost seems as though he's been running, like he's barely been sitting still for ten minutes and has instead been pushing on before the moment of his collapse.

“You're sweaty,” George comments, offhanded and not the real question of his words. He plays with the hem of Dream's shirt, loosely touching the material as though it's made of silk and not that rough black that Dream loves.

“I was playing football earlier,” Dream explains. He smiles, red, and lets his tongue toy with the bar between his lips, a nervous habit perhaps, but George hasn't been around long enough to know how to stop it.

“Oh?”

There's enough calm to last a decade. Behind the car, around a corner, a leaf falls to the ground, crashing down from a tree without elegance or harmony, and it's taken by the wind to run along a cobbled path. It's not loud, nobody is there to see it, but in the back of George's mind he can tell that something isn't quite right.

George is tugged forwards with a hand on his waist, lips being pushed to his in a fashion that's far more hurried than he's used to. There's passion in the way that Dream kisses, not the type that George knows or the type that he likes, but the passion that makes Dream bite down and pull away, red in the way he shouldn't be.

“What's wrong?” George asks, disconnecting from the other and sitting back.

The way Dream cowers is foreign, spoken in a language that George can't understand, and when he's touched the braille of each word is etched over his skin to help him grasp onto meaning. Tilting his head to one side shows question, of course Dream doesn't have to tell him anything, there's an out at every step and George won't push because he never does—this isn't a secret that Dream is keeping out of malice anyway.

“Nothing,” Dream laughs dryly, an answer even though it doesn't explain much. “Just something Sapnap said.”

A hand on Dream's arm, thumb rubbing circles into his skin. “Do you want to tell me?”

“He...” It's said with a smile, like he's shaking away the thought and pretending it's a distant memory. “He called me a whore.” The curl of Dream's lips is like poison, insatiable and yet George knows he isn't the one to relate and tear away those problems. “And I know that's what people think of me, and you've probably thought it too, but I didn't exactly like it.”

“I'm—”

“It's fine,” Dream dismisses, sighing. “But just because someone likes sex it doesn't make them an awful person. I haven't done anything wrong.”

An ounce of dread sits in the pit of George's stomach, clawing its way up his chest and the back of his throat. If George had to imagine, he's as stone-faced as Dream, if not worse. It's not often that he feels wrong, although in the past few weeks he's been feeling more skewed than not, but when he thinks about his own assumptions and the walls he's built and tore because of them, it's as close to guilty as he'll ever feel.

“You get that, right?” Dream asks, searching for a drop of cherry remorse on George's features.

And he does, so he says. George takes his hand and settles by the roots of Dream's hair, just holding to try and stop that hurt look from running even further down Dream's face. “Yeah.” Still, he can't help himself from asking more. “Why did Sap say that?”

“It doesn't matter.” A shake of the head, apology dancing in blue. “I said some things I regret as well.”

“How so?”

Dream's sigh falls with the air, light and heavy at the exact same time. “I just know some things he'd rather I didn't,” he confesses, glancing to umber eyes and letting viridian green flash with the intensity. “And I've done some things I know he doesn't like too.”

A citrus infused smile just shows the cracks on George's expression. He doesn't ask how to help or what to do, but there's a part of him that wishes he could do something other than sit cluelessly.

“It doesn't matter,” Dream reiterates. He takes a moment to collect himself, where he shakes the sadness out of his eyes and replaces it with the fondness that George knows best. It's not a perfect switch but it's sincere, like Dream really does want to put it all behind him and give George his everything instead. “Nothing for you to worry your pretty little head about anyway.”

“*Dream.*” George still isn't satisfied.

“George,” Dream rebuts. “He's your friend, I don't want to say anything bad.”

Under the limelight, Dream almost looks guilty.

Confusion is painted in bold stripes and George still doesn't understand it all. He doesn't know if he wants to know, and he doesn't know if he could really let himself and Dream tear down him and Sappnap, but the way that Dream decides he doesn't want to tell him things makes George stir, silently scared and not in the place to feel wronged.

"Are you keeping secrets from me?" George still asks, blue.

"What makes you say that?"

"Nothing," George hums. Two hands are on the collar of Dream's shirt, fixing and adjusting and smoothing down each crease, either for his comfort, or for Dream's, he doesn't really know. "Just intuition."

"I'll tell you eventually," Dream compromises. "Just not right now."

"Why?"

There's a moment of pause where Dream thinks. It's falling humanity, dread in grey and a corpse in black, and George isn't upset by anything, but he's puzzled to say the least.

"Because it'll change the way you think of me." Dream is silent. "And I don't know if I can handle that right now."

A laugh bubbles from George's throat, forced and breathless. "I don't think that's possible."

"Can you promise that?" Dream asks. His gaze follows George's hesitance, watching over the way he can't quite get himself to say yes without judgement. Being self-assured is difficult and yet George tries to put on that brave face for Dream, failing with sugared lips when he smiles but it doesn't really meet his eyes, all on display for Dream to see and take apart. "...yeah."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

George can't promise the world but he still cares.

"Yeah." One hand on George's waist, the other snaking up to rub over George's knuckles and resting there. "I have you, don't I?"

The lights in Dream's eyes leave George mesmerised. A subtle movement pulls George forward, hips flush to Dream's where he sits on top of him, and they're still in a car, and George has to crane his neck to sit down and be comfortable, but the way a yellow glow catches on the end of Dream's piercing is always going to keep his immersion.

"You want a kiss?" George asks, smiling again when Dream nods with eager excitement. "Are you going to ask nicely?"

Their faces are close, hearts are open; George can practically feel Dream's breath ghosting over his lips. Where their skin touches, sparks of silver fly, cliché and overdone, but George still loves the sense. Dream's bottom lip is pulled through pearly teeth, a distraction before George's own lips are taken hostage and he's kissed to breathlessness.

They've kissed before, enough for it to be easy to slip into again. And George lets himself be moulded by painted hands while his lips part and Dream's tongue slides against them, as red as paint and bloodied mulberry. His chest is tight too. The dirty blond strands of Dream's hair are used as leverage for George to push closer and do his best not to fall too deep. He pushes himself in tighter proximity and Dream just takes it, pushing back with the energy he'd been using to stay so



red-faced.

The way that Dream kisses is dirty.

He slips his tongue into George's mouth, placing one hand on the side of his neck to keep him in place. Sharp teeth puncture a pink lower lip, the piercings in his mouth being snagged by George's own teeth when he takes a snake bite into his mouth and smiles at the gasp it draws from Dream's throat.

"Fuck," Dream gasps, low and gravelly. The sound of his voice is enough to make George shudder, hips rolling instinctively when cold hands snake up the side of his shirt just to clamp over his skin and keep him from falling.

Breath falls from between George's lips, uncontrollable sin. He makes no effort to correct his wrongs.

"I bet you wish I had that tongue piercing now," Dream comments, so soft when he lets his nose press over George's neck, lips following as light as a feather. He moves as though it's the first time he's ever seen George's body, exploring new territory while the dimming light above flickers and refuses to illuminate their surroundings. It's just a small movement, nothing that George hasn't felt before, but it still manages to make him still, not quite knowing where to put his hands when Dream presses open mouthed kisses against the stretch of skin.

"You're such an idiot."

Each muscle in George's body feels lax, as though he's letting himself slump into Dream's touch and doesn't know how to pick himself back up. Hot pink blooms in picturesque swirls over the side of George's face, the suspension of disbelief dropping and falling when a bite is held to the side of his neck.

At the forefront, it's just teeth. Sharp, sharp teeth. They hurt at first, ripping through George's every sense and making him curl, a whine so loud and his eyes darting open when he realises how Dream is working him up. And it only takes a second for his heart to pick up and send blood rushing down, that same heat and attraction making George's knees go fully weak as he feels himself grow hard.

"*Dream*," and George has never heard himself be so pathetic, open and unashamed. The way his mouth drops open is foreign, the way his throat seizes and his skin runs hot as though he's being hypnotised is electrifying. He's never known himself to be so sensitive, even the littlest of touches seem to make him shake, and it feels so good that George wishes it didn't have to stop. "Not on the neck."

"Why not?" A coy smirk is on Dream's lips, so drastically different from the way he'd been before.

"Sapnap will notice,"

"Don't care," Dream mutters, blistering with determination and aconite pleasure.

The dead of the night watches Dream lean forward, working himself against George's neck to ruin him in reds and purples and mulberry marks. It's filthy, brimmed with the insatiable feeling that's so reminiscent of the things George knows he'll never be over. The reminder of a first meeting, the way Dream looks when he shreds off a shirt, and god, the hickeys that don't paint his skin anymore are almost unrighteous. George should be replicating them every day with the hope that

Dream will only wear them around him.

“God,” George says aloud. There’s a man on his side and he’s toying with him as though he’s his favourite game, nipping and breaking and snapping every twig he steps on. “What is with you today?”

“Nothing.” Dream’s not lying, George can tell, but the attention is stifling. “I just want to be near you.”

“You and Sapnap are being weird.”

It’s the only words that can snap Dream out of his trance. Deafening silence follows a crash, and Dream isn’t a bad person but George is, and the only way to truly put out a fire is by adding more and hoping it fizzles away by itself.

“We aren’t,” Dream lies, eyes angled down and then up, and then he’s met with a gaze that tells him to stop, one that George can feel ripping his features in two. “We are.” A beat where he figures out his words, another where he goes back on them. “But we’ll figure that out, it’s not fair on you to drag you into it.”

“Fine,” George sighs, repetition, again. “But you’ll tell me if it gets bad?”

Lying is a trait that only George knows. From the beginning, the only way to save face is to lie and hope that not a soul catches on, but only George has acquired that trait, everyone else is so see-through that it’s almost painful. It’s low and it’s red, and George can almost hear himself breathe, each breath panted out as the stinging on his neck never stops—a constant reminder of the damage that Dream can do.

“Of course.” If Dream’s one thing then it’s honest—vulnerable in the times that George can’t understand, when the mood swings from high to low and he doesn’t know if he should mention the way he rubs against his pants or simply focus on the way Dream makes him feel in his entirety. “I really do trust you George, probably more than anyone I’ve ever been with.”

The lack of caution in which Dream does things will never not be admirable. Sugared smiles are weak and the heaviness of George’s eyelids only means he’s slipping harder. In lust, in like, it’s all the same anyway.

“Yeah?”

Perhaps he wants compliments, there’s a chance he just wants the attention. George will still laugh when Dream wants him, there’s no way he deserves it.

“Yeah, you’re different.” There’s no hiding attraction, a thin veil has been ripped into pieces and Dream stares through like a bride not knowing whether to run from the altar. “I just want to listen to you talk and watch you laugh for as long as you’ll let me.”

It’s a subtle shift, and if George wasn’t covered in the reds of Dream’s desire then he might be able to notice how everything seems to get closer, like crashes of amber tie strings around his wrists and Dream’s, refusing them to break eye contact by keeping everything running with tangerine want.

“You’re an idiot,” George scoffs. His face is burning, cheeks managing to hurt from the way they try not to show his smile. And the cold almost burns. George almost hurts himself trying not to feel so wanted.

“I’m being serious.” Dream manages to make things a thousand times more real—he speaks with

clear intention, a honeyed tone dropping and flashing with seduction. It's a spiralling thought, George never truly thought that things would get this far, but now they're here and there's no going back—he doesn't want to.

A pause, Dream's eyes flashing with silver need before they dull to pink and green and tell George more than words ever will.

He builds up with an inhale, beating his own heart with a bloodied bat until it's right there for George to see and take for his own. "For the first time in forever, I'm with someone that doesn't just want me for sex," Dream breaks, he waits and he waits, and the words come out so slowly that George has to hang off of every one, trying to see Dream's emotions and not being able to grasp finely onto any. "You don't just want to mess around and never call me again, or think these awful things about me and say them behind my back, you're different." Dream laughs dryly. "I like being around you, and Sapnap does too, it's why he's so tense all the time."

"What?"

Dream is flawed. George has known it from the very start, and yet he's still here. They're both making mistakes and they aren't tied down right yet but he wants to be. His eyes drop down because they're too weak to hold Dream's stare, the contact is too bruising and the shiver that runs through George's body is too much to go unnoticed. So he sits and lets the words sink in, finally managing to see them for what they are, instead of just a fling.

Because they aren't a fling, they're together. And to some people that might not be serious, but to Dream it seems like it is. And any predetermined thoughts that George had on Dream's idea of togetherness needs to die with the feeling of guilt that Dream is slowly slipping off.

Another break.

It's obvious in Dream's eyes that he shakes the thought and George's confusion as though they're one. "I'll tell you later."

"Why later?" George lets a smile slip onto his face, hoping to salvage the brightness of the passing day.

"Because right now I want to kiss you," Dream shrugs, because that grin gets him anywhere, and now with George's trust in his hands there's no way for him to mess it up. "If you'll let me?"

"Idiot."

There's no stopping them this time.

They're both complete messes but that's fine, eventually they'll be over it. The space inside George's mind is filled with no thought other than Dream. Dream's hands on his skin, Dream's lips on his, and kissing has never been so lustful, not when Dream does it like he's starving, biting and pushing George back and god, George wants for more.

He lets his lips be bitten raw. The sting of one cut not able to stop him from feeling on top of the world. He's high on the feeling of Dream's confessions, the words that tell him he's perfect, fuelling each tart movement he makes—the way he lets his body roll and his hips push down while he's guided by hands that don't seem to know what they're doing.

They're grinding against each other, messy and passionate, with an anchor of hope and desire and all those disgusting things that George never thought he'd really have. He takes piercing after piercing and tugs using sharp fangs, each time with more force than before as he hopes to hear the

sounds that got him into this state filter into the apricot air with no penitence.

Ferocity lines Dream movements, they're feeding each other with homemade euphoria, kissing dirty and wrong, and maybe George is putting too much of himself into it but this is how he knows himself, and Dream will know him the same. It's cramped and it's uncomfortable and yet George doesn't care. He needs it, craves it, and Dream is the one that's giving it to him, kissing him without a thought towards whether or not he'll break.

Coils of the most crimson pleasure rush down George's body, in his stomach, in his pants, and he can feel himself sitting half hard and getting harder, the fly of his jeans almost making the whole thing uncomfortable. Under him, Dream doesn't seem to be as forward, he guides George's hips down with two hands, bringing their bodies together and letting them crash and burn.

It's so taunting, George can almost feel himself losing sanity, but this is as far as they've ever really gone, and now that he's here he doesn't know how to fix it.

Dream breaks them apart, with hesitance and regret, but he looks into George's eyes and tells him the words he's heard before. "George, if you keep moving like that then I'm going to have a problem."

Normally he'd act dumb, pretend he doesn't know what Dream means when he's so clearly red in the face and struggling to breathe. But he's so embarrassingly desperate and he trusts Dream more than he can put together, so when Dream cares for him as much as he does, there's no way he'll act as though this is just a guilty pleasure that'll go away if he doesn't think about it enough.

So instead, George tilts his head. He knows how he looks, white shirt too thin, and hair messed up by his own motions. He looks fuckable, Dream sees it too. "Do you want me to stop?"

"Not really." Dream confesses, helping George's rocking hips with an open mouth. "But we're in my car."

"Take me inside then." Helplessness in despair, George is a caricature of the things he thought Dream was.

"Sap's inside," Dream reasons, being sensible, even when he clearly doesn't want to be. "He's been in his room since yesterday."

There's a time to be a tease.

It's a new accommodation for George, he's never had the golden opportunity. So he leans forward and lets his hair fall in front of his eyes, lowering his voice to a whisper and biting lightly on Dream's earlobe by using a move that he's only ever felt. "I can be quiet."

"*Fuck.*" Dream groans, tilting his head back as George presses a kiss to the spot just under his jaw. "God, George, you're going to kill me."

Love bites are the best way to describe them. George marks Dream with his teeth as though he's just an animal, claiming territory with ivory canines before lapping over the skin with his tongue and keeping his mouth there. It's impure, blackened irises and intensified want. And George feels in control, like Dream is giving him everything and still letting him hold the power.

"Fine," Dream agrees, cocky again because he needs to gain face. "But you're going to have to sneak out tomorrow morning, before he finds you."

"As long as you promise to drive me home." A kiss to Dream's lips, blurring everything with bitter

recklessness. "I already walked here in the dark."

It's a cue to start again. George lets his hips roll down, and he lets Dream kiss him how he wants, it's the thing that drives them both mad. There's no use pretending they don't want each other. It's a miracle they got this far without tearing each other apart on an off day, but George's lack of practice must be evident, because after each touch he's gasping for more, and Dream is only getting better.

"Fuck," Dream gasps, choking as George's mind tries to catch up to everything they're doing, each new move he never knew himself capable of. "Fuck, out. Now,"

They both reach for the door handle, fingers melding like welded iron when they meet and struggle to get out. Perhaps if they weren't moving with such haste then it'd be easier, but they can't stop now, they're both too lost in the idea of each other to really drag themselves out.

It's all sugared lips and viscous, visceral desperation. George holds no semblance of control when he stumbles, laughing in the cold dark air when Dream barely manages to close his own car before returning to his arms. It's like they're drawn to each other, not able to stop touching for more than five minutes, and they're being needy at this point, but this is it, and George shows his excitement without fail.

The front door is open. Dream must not have locked it.

It's a giggle, high pitched and indelicate as Dream's presses his lips against the crook of George's neck—a coarse laugh bubbling against muted alabaster while they walk, two steps for each second, then rushing and rushing with the floorboards' creak—the sound—almost as though they're about to break.

There's shushing, a tangled mess of hands and tongues as Dream spins George and pulls him close, makes no effort to conceal his want and keeps them pressed against one another with dark intent. Honey trails in broad strokes, obnoxious is a simple way of spelling it, but the illusion of lips pressed against earlobes and unsavoury smiles isn't just an illusion anymore. It's real and it's bright and George can only hope that Sappnap won't be there to see the afterglow.

Friendship bleeds orange. Dream grips George's waist strong enough for it to bloom red.

There's a cloud of peach, apricot-orange drifting through George's fingertips and under the cracks of each door, strong enough to sit tantalizingly sweet under his own nose as he strains not to laugh with stone crafted hands gripping strong on his waist.

They stumble up stairs, trying not to let the door slam shut behind them, but it's slightly hopeless, they're too dazed to really give a shit. No matter how fast they move, it's not fast enough, George drags Dream to the bed and lets the backs of his own knees hit the frame, forcing him to sit and pull the other down with him.

There's no telling how much he wants it, in the moment he's falling and Dream doesn't know the extent of it all but George is close to begging. He's rushing, trying to get it done in the way he hopes that Dream will like it, but obviously it doesn't work. He's stopped by slow lips before he can get any further.

The way George is taught patience is so tantalisingly sweet. He's hard in his pants and he can feel his cock twitch against his underwear, surely leaking and making a mess of the rest of him, but George isn't sure how to stop it. This isn't just a hook-up, it's not a small thing with a guy he doesn't actually care about, it's real. So Dream makes him learn.

Fast movements are polished down to quiet need by Dream's skilful tongue. Two hands settle on George's waist and push him up the bed, Dream crawling over him with an arched smile. Almost instinctively, he leans forward, only being met with a shake of the head, Dream refusing to give him the upper hand and making him wait, exercising strength.

But Dream can't last forever, and eventually George's fidgeting gets the better of him. When Dream leans down it's slow, almost mocking, and the marble of George's figure cracks once again because he doesn't know how to handle it. Pure nectar is poured down his throat, one syllable more of a cry than anything else, and Dream draws the sound from his mouth just by using practice to his advantage.

Each kiss feels like something stolen, a touch that should never have happened. But when red cherries melt so deliciously sweet on his tongue and George's hands tangle tight in Dream's hair, there's no guilt running through his mind at all.

It's hopeless but it's perfect, George's head tilting back when Dream's palm makes its way to the back of his neck, holding him in place while their lips move in imperfect unison. He gasps and he chokes, and he tries not to make too much noise just because he knows who could hear, but the thought is fleeting and Dream's touch is firm, George just learns to melt into it.

"There you go sweetheart," Dream mumbles, his thumb swiping across George's pink lower lip before forcing its way inside of his mouth, pressing down so hard against his tongue that George can barely paw around him, tasting cherry and blackness and all the things he loves the most. "We can't have Sapnap hearing us now, can we?"

"Don't talk about your brother during sex," George huffs, the vowels muffled as he tries to form them around Dream's fingers even as another presses into his mouth, forcing his lips open even more.

"You look pretty like this," Dream dismisses, rampant, charmed. "Then again, you're always pretty."

"Shut up," George scowls, wrapping his fingers around Dream's wrist to pull him out of his mouth. Careful touches pad down Dream's chest, smoothing other blackened material and tugging on the hem of a thin shirt. "Off."

"Demanding," Dream grins, obliging nevertheless. And George can't stop the way his eyes wander when Dream's shirt lays crumpled on the floor.

Excitement makes George curious. He's so scared of the things he doesn't know but Dream is the best teacher he's ever going to have. The fear of being too bossy is non-existent, he wants to shake, be trembling because of the way he's teased and toyed with, and right now being bossy is the only way he'll ever get what he wants.

"Pants too," George says.

It might just be something in the air, because they're falling apart at the very seams, waiting for a cue to stop and never getting one. There's breathless appreciation—George doesn't quite know what to do but he knows that he likes it, that he's nodding at every question and making sure Dream can see just how long he's been waiting.

Dream helps him strip. He tears George's clothes away like they're just decoration, something he can do without. It's just tonight that they'll be like this, maybe another day in the future, but right now they don't know what the future holds and optimism will only get them so far.

They'll make it work, George will put his everything into making sure they don't fall apart. So he lets Dream pull his shirt from his body with no objection, lets his legs be touched and for two fingers to dip under the waistband of his shorts until they're dragged down and discarded on the floor.

They're still in their underwear but Dream takes the opportunity to act as though he's never been intimate with another in this way. It's cherry kisses and the smiles aren't filled with sugar anymore. Repetition makes it worth it. Dream kisses down George's chest and he leaves hickeys as clear as day on snow skin so they stand out that much more.

Each stretch is usually alabaster but Dream changes it within seconds. He lets raspberry smudge on George's torso, leaves strawberry fingerprints on his waist from just how hard he's been touching, and it's almost like a dream but George knows he's awake from the way he hears himself moan.

"Gorgeous," Dream praises, each kiss being followed with an utterance of a compliment. "I'm so lucky."

Arms go up, George's back almost in a perfect arch when he leans into Dream's lips and lets himself be used. There's pleasure and then there's this and this is far more than simple pleasure, this is exultation. George hasn't even been touched and yet he's feeling tired, he can't do anything other than lay there and let each part of him be worshipped by another evil-doer.

The world can't move now, they're in a part of time that never changes, one where it's just the two of them and no one else can hear the indecency that they're a part of. For better or for worse, George finds himself at home under another. And it takes so much more strength to admit that than to pretend he's never wanted this in secret.

Recognition is in Dream's eyes when he looks up, messy with dilated pupils and distraught hair from the way that George has been pulling on it. He glances up and then down, gaze hazy under stardust as the urgency spreads, on the edge of rush but still in safety. "Am I going to?" he asks, a look in his eyes that means he doesn't really have to expand.

In all of George's fantasies the minor details have never truly been hashed out, who goes where, and what does what, so he nods because it's easy, because he's fucked himself once before and he trusts Dream to do it better than a simple toy can.

"If you want," George says, liquid gold in his world as Dream leans up and kisses him with the same mouth that's been dragging red all over his body.

"I definitely want," Dream breathes. "Stay on your back."

A body stands up, it moves with the shadows and rolls to one side to open a drawer and retract a small bottle from just out of sight. Blurred vision makes it all surreal, taunting. And George has to shake away the fog so he can see exactly what's going on and let himself submit.

Even the way Dream holds himself is attractive. He knows what he's doing and that's the best thing out of them all, because George needs guidance. He hasn't done this before, and there's never a right time to say that so he doesn't, it's not as though it really matters.

In Dream's hands the bottle looks small, giant when it's dropped to the bed and falls against George's skin, so cold it sets his senses on fire. The only thing between George's body and Dream's is the thin layer of fabric that they both wear. It doesn't hide much. Even through blackness, George can see the outline of Dream's cock and the way he's hard from their kissing alone.

It's scandalous, like touching in all the best ways. And the reminder of pleasure is promised and delivered, Dream moving to take his own underwear and drag it down.

"Are you sure you want this?" He asks, confirmation coming before action.

"Yes," George whispers. In all honesty, he's not sure his voice can be any louder.

In George's mind, Dream isn't flawed. In reality, it's not too different. It's unholy, the way George stares after Dream's underwear is dropped—how his eyes fix to the image of Dream's hand wrapped around himself as he strokes and strokes, and brings himself to full hardness with the help of the bottle of lube. In full, in nude, Dream is beautiful. He's every wet dream that George has ever had, and he's branded with the most merciless grin that scares even George now that he knows what he's in for.

"Can I?" Dream asks, gesturing to George's underwear.

He isn't quite sure how to respond. It's undivided attention on him, Dream's eyes raking up and down his body like he's worthwhile, and eventually George nods, glancing away when cold air hits his cock and his underwear is thrown to the floor with the rest of his clothes.

Embarrassment only fuels George's arousal. His cock twitches when he's watched, and Dream must notice because he refuses to let the pink that dusts George's cheeks move along, aiming to keep it there for as long as possible.

"Spread your legs baby," he says, honeyed voice because he knows that's the thing that makes George weak.

It's almost too much. George's legs press together in an attempt to keep some of his dignity, and at this point there's nothing that's really left to maintain but he needs to at least pretend to care. Dream's hand is large, it gently pries his legs apart, holding onto one of George's thighs and spreading him open, not giving him the opportunity to close his legs and hide away again.

His worst trait is that he enjoys it. When Dream makes George feel weak, the only thing that runs through his veins is bliss, and defeat comes second, pristine expression being torn apart by Dream dropping his head down so he's not even looking at George's face anymore, just his body and the secrets it holds.

"Don't be shy," Dream coos. He pushes George's legs up so his knees hit his chest, looking over everything and even having the guts to reach out and touch. "So pretty."

Dream's thumb catching on George's rim is intentional—meant to make him gasp, but still, Dream looks at him as though the sound is a surprise, like George is the one that's tempting *him*,

"Pretty cock too."

"*Dream*," George whines, trying to close his legs but it's no use, Dream is holding him with double the strength.

"What?" Dream chuckles. "I'm right."

Subtle breaths fly like petals, they're soft but they're torn. The embers that set George alight burn the butterflies in his stomach, helpless desperation only making him try and push his head back into a pillow to avoid being seen.

Constellations dazzle George's view when the popping of a bottle cap draws his true attention.



There's a squeeze and the slow placement as it falls back onto the bed, and George can hear Dream slick up his fingers as he sits on his knees between George's thighs.

"One day I'm going to eat you out," Dream comments, forcing a whimper to fall from between George's lips.

"Why not today?" he asks, feigning nonchalance.

"Because today I want to fuck you." Dream grins, wicked. "You want that too, Georgie?"

Words get stuck in the back of his throat. The way that Dream turns on charm should be illegal, and the way he tugs on his own piercings with his teeth is criminal. It's lewd, dirty, and yet George loves it, he loves the rush that want gives him. At first he tries to just nod, give silent confirmation that yes, yes he definitely wants it, but of course that's not good enough for Dream.

Dream, who tilts his head to one side, and makes George say it aloud.

"Yes," George breathes. "I want you to—to do *that*."

A single laugh burns with acid. And George tenses, feeling the cool of the lube smear across the back of his thigh as he pushes them together in front of both his and Dream's chests.

"Keep them spread." Dream orders. "Or I'll need to hold them open."

Mistakenly, George doesn't answer. Cranberry sits mottled over the bridge of his nose, telling again the secret that Dream already knew. He looks away like it'll save him, as though he didn't learn a thing from the other times he's been spoken to.

"Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you?" Dream pushes. "There's no shame Georgie, I'll keep your legs held spread for as long as you want."

"Shut up."

It's bite, not malice.

But George is silenced by Dream's spare hand pushing forward and slipping into his mouth, forcing him to accommodate two fingers while the opposite hand trails wetness down his leg and circles his rim. He can feel his hole clench around nothing, trying to take something he isn't given just because of how much he wants it. And all Dream can do is laugh, spotting both the pained expression on George's face and the way he can't help but gag and suck on what's in his mouth anyway.

"Always so feisty, it's a wonder you haven't bitten my fingers off," Dream laughs, more to himself than anyone else. "You ready?"

Shooting daggers at Dream's chest is all George can really do. He bites the tip of Dream's finger, not too hard but enough to make him pull back, concern on his expression as though he's worried he's done something wrong. "I can't speak with your hand down my throat, idiot," George explains.

"Sorry." Dream doesn't look sorry at all.

"Yes, I'm ready though."

There's one finger at George's entrance. It doesn't push in but it circles around, teasing. Perhaps

it's just because of the night's confessions, but George acts like this is the most sensitive he's ever been. Each touch makes him shudder, the feeling of being watched like this, addictive, and there's nothing George wants more than for things to speed up, for this to happen that much quicker.

"Relax," Dream mumbles, rubbing small circles against his skin. "You're all tense."

"I can't just relax when you're staring down there," George huffs.

Exposition makes him shake. Viridian eyes are trained so firmly on George's body that they're heavy, almost acting like weights as they keep him frozen. It only serves to make George that much more rigid, completely unable to let himself enjoy it when he's being betrayed by Dream's curiosity. So Dream frowns, brows furrowed together as he tries to see what's going on.

"You're acting like this is your first time," he says dismissively.

As if to prove a point, George whines, grumbling in annoyance as he lies in his own self-pity. It's not his fault that he's never done this before, and there's no need to make a big deal out of the fact, but to Dream it's as though the idea that this isn't George's usual Sunday night is ludicrous, impossible to believe.

The trying stops, heat in the pit of George's stomach and between his thighs while he attempts not to move and still keep his legs open, completely bare and slightly humiliated, but George can't really hate the attention. Moments pass before there are lips on his again, silencing as Dream's tongue runs along George's lower lip to dull his senses.

Pink reverberates in the air, delicate as it wraps around George's mind and keeps his body limp.

It only takes a few seconds for George to register what's going on—for him to gasp out in shock as Dream's pushes in while keeping him down, making sure George doesn't have the silver time for anxiety to floor back into his senses.

"*Oh*," he murmurs, locking his arms around Dream's neck. "Fuck."

"So responsive," Dream chuckles, voice wavering with a laugh as he pushes his finger in further.

It's only one, just his index finger pressing inside of George while his thumb scrapes over his rim, long and thick and reaching into him so deliciously perfect that George can't help but twine. There's no getting used to it, the way Dream works George open by pumping one finger in and out, slow then fast, a hysterical pace to set.

It feels filthy, even if it's not a lot to take. And above him, George can see the way Dream never looks away, taking in his every movement with equal desperation.

One finger manages to reach so much further into him than George ever imagined. When he touched himself before it was simple, not easy by any means, but he'd been able to drive himself into a hazy mind with little task, but now it's even better. Each crook of Dream's hand is tantalizing, as though he knows what George likes and is doing his best to cater to his every need. And it's so good already, only made better by the way Dream breathes dark in his ear.

"I remember the vibrator you bought," he murmurs, quiet with a crimson tone. "God, I couldn't stop thinking about it after."

George's hole is dripping with lube, the sound of Dream's fingers pushing into him making a distastefully wet sound as the excess keeps him ready.

“That was a joke,” George shudders, an innocent image burning up completely.

“So you’ve never used it?” Dream questions. There’s no way to lie, George can’t do anything except keep his emotions plastered across the heights of his cheeks in red, a blush forming so quickly over pale, marked skin when Dream raises a simple brow and asks again. “Exactly.”

For reasons easily explained, another slight of hand makes George moan, head tipping back as he tries not to scream for the fear of being too loud.

“You’re so dirty,” Dream mumbles. “Can you take another?”

“Yes.”

The second finger is so much better. It’s more of a stretch than the first, nothing that George can’t take though, he knows he’s had more from himself. Praise threatens to slip from between George’s lips. He attempts to tell Dream what he needs, how good he feels, but it won’t come out—he’s too caught up in the pleasure to let the words fall.

Nothing can compare to the feeling of Dream’s fingers scissoring apart and working him open. George’s legs stay trapped on both sides of Dream’s waist, a likely strange angle for Dream’s wrist but he needs the body between him to stop him from closing up again. They crook to one side, searching for something while pumping in and out, and for a moment George is confused, before a sensation that he’s only felt a few other times rips through him.

Against his stomach, George’s cock twitches—his prostate being abused by Dream’s precision while he writhes. Nothing can keep him still, it’s unconventional, a tempo so quick he struggles to pluck the strings of any instrument fast enough, but the pleasure is so unwavering that George can’t let it go.

A chin is forced to the ceiling, jaw pulled open by the ‘o’ of a mouth when George moans, pleasure coiling through him and cracking him from the inside out. He knows how he looks, how the practice that Dream has had makes him fall apart in ways that no one else ever could.

George breaks with the loudest of noises, head turning and turning so he can look away and clutch onto the edges of rapture before it’s over. “Fuck,” he gasps, because no matter what it’s not enough, he needs more and Dream has to be the one to give it to him. “Need you,”

And despite how fucking wretched Dream looks, he shakes his head. “Just one more,” he says, perhaps to himself or possibly to George. Either way neither of them really want to wait.

“No,” George complains. He holds onto Dream’s shoulders, locks eyes with him as though looking away will cost him his life. “Want you.”

“Yes,” Dream continues, adamant. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

George gasps when the third finger pushes in, sliding in alongside the rest with more haste than before. It’s never enough, it’s so much and Dream manages to work him open so perfectly with the three, but he still needs more. The stretch meets George finding himself trying to push down against it, his hips doing their best to meet Dream’s hand, but it never happens, Dream is just one step ahead.

There’s something gripping his waist, holding onto the shallow lines of his hips to push him down against the bed and make him take it. And George gasps and moans, and hopes his expression doesn’t show too much.

“Fuck,” he groans, resisting the urge to lean down and stroke himself to completion.

Opposite, Dream smiles, slowing his hand as he sees George get a bit too close. “Are you ready?” he asks, almost whispering as a ginger touch traces across his chest.

Three fingers slip back out, leaving George so awfully empty as the feeling still lingers. White pleasure makes a small cry fall from George’s lips, little noises leaving him with enough air to filter straight into the air. It feels so real, personal; George can barely conceptualise the fact that it’s really happening.

“Kiss me?” A small request, Dream obliges.

Lips brush against each other with rose. The taste is too soft to really be noticed.

They’re close in every way. Physical and emotional, and Dream must see the red swirls on George’s chest because he matches the picture with his own version of lust.

One hand reaches down, the pop of a bottle cap ever so present in the stale air. The room is so quiet, breathing being loud when there’s nothing to compare it to. And George doesn’t care if there’s ever been other people in his position, because right now it’s just him, him here on his back in Dream’s bed, being given everything and so much more.

The head of Dream’s cock presses up against his rim, heavy when it’s held there. It’s so different when he just has to lay down and wait, when he doesn’t need to put in the effort to lean down and do it himself.

“Can you feel it?” Dream asks.

George doesn’t know how to respond. “Yeah.”

It’s still so clumsy, there’s lube tracking down the backs of George’s thighs, almost tickling him as it runs away. Just the feeling of Dream against him is overwhelming too, it’s daunting—how big he feels like this—and when George is already so open, the feeling of a stretch is compelling.

When he did it himself he rushed—now Dream wants to put his time into it.

“Stop teasing,” George croaks.

“Sorry.”

The head catches against his hole. George can already feel his eyes rolling back. There’s nothing to be scared of, but George is still fearful. There’s power where he sits and power when he looks up to see Dream’s grave expression, how he shakes where he holds himself to make sure he can push himself properly.

“Please,” George whimpers, one last time, the very last.

Dream’s cock feels perfect. He presses in far too slowly, forcing George open when he thrusts in and in and doesn’t give him a chance to breathe. It feels so amazing, so good to be there with rugged walls and a small expression. And George’s mouth hangs open when he does his best to take it all.

There’s no telling how long they’ll be there—Dream isn’t just long but he’s thick too, hitting every single spot inside of George all at once.

“Oh fuck,” George mewls. “Big, big, fuck.”

All the words run to Dream’s ego. They keep him knowing that he’s doing everything George wants without the need for real compliments, and thank god they do, because they encourage him to take the back of George’s thighs in his hand and push them back against his chest, testing his flexibility while pressing even deeper.

A dulcet tone makes sure George stays calm, small words of encouragement falling into the air from Dream’s two lips. Each breath he takes is easy, calculated, and he can hear a small chuckle above him but he doesn’t really care—all he wants is for Dream to fuck him likes he means it.

Mere seconds pass where George can barely breathe. He’s writhing on the bed, biting out cherry flavoured words and trying not to fall apart too quick.

“So big, oh my god.”

Calloused fingers hold George’s body in place, hips pressed down against the bed, and George wants to do more, but his mind simply won’t let him.

“Deep breaths, George.”

“Feels so good,” he gasps, feeling Dream finally start to bottom out and rest inside of him. “So full.”

Pathetically, he takes a glance down between their bodies, watching how they connect and the way Dream still holds onto the base of his cock with one hand to anchor himself. It’s almost too big, the stretch still making George shake, but he knows he can take it and he wants to more than anything.

“How are you so tight?” Dream asks, letting his head drop low and his hair fall in front of his eyes. He bites his bottom lip, ivory teeth snagging on the skin when he holds back his groan. “*Fuck*, I could’ve stretched you on four fingers and you’d still feel like a virgin.”

George only whimpers. The fact that Dream’s cock has got him like this should be embarrassing, but George feels far too good to care. He can see the veins tracking over Dream’s arms, red and green and all the most striking colours mixing over his skin when he holds George to the same degree.

And a while ago, George would’ve never thought himself capable of such a display.

When Dream holds his legs up, he looks between them, knowing that Dream is doing the same and wondering if he sees anything different. Perhaps they see different colours, or maybe even another one entirely, but desperation in the same when they’re both in this particular position, and George can feel Dream’s cock twitch inside of him as a constant reminder

“There you go,” Dream says, fingers running up George’s chest and digging in ever so slightly.

He’s just kneeling there, sitting still as though he’s scared to move properly. And the appreciation that George feels is so easily overshadowed by need. Heavy gazes and the longest stares are the things that lie between them, Dream’s eyes can only stay focused for so long.

“Move,” George whimpers. “Please Dream, move, need you to move.”

It’s teasing, how Dream draws back until just the tip sits in George’s hole. Inch after inch, breath after breath, George feels agony, the pleasure being taken from him as Dream refuses to actually fuck him the way he’s meant to. He’s panting, having to force his own eyes not to water as Dream

sets a harrowingly slow pace.

“What do you want, baby?” Dream asks, a mocking drawl dancing in sticky black tar.

“Move,” George demands, pushy as always.

“I am.”

*If it's possible, Dream gets even slower. He makes sure to pull almost all the way out and thrust straight back in, tantalizingly measured and completely deliberate.*

“Faster,” George complains, head tipped back in both annoyance and lust. “Please god, faster.”

“You’re being loud,” Dream warns, not really doing anything to muffle George’s sounds.

“Someone’s going to hear.”

“Don’t care.”

*A simple laugh makes George smile, Dream’s voice the thing that breaks all tension. Dream’s hips move flush to George’s ass, forcing his cock so deep inside of him that it’s criminal. Even if the pace is too little, George knows it’s still enough to make him tremble. He takes it, each thrust and each push, and he loves every single second.*

“So tight George,” Dream says again. And George has fucked himself before but it’s never been like this, he’s never felt as full as when Dream is the one giving it to him, so he can barely imagine how it feels from the other side.

“Faster.”

*Dream ignores him again. It’s not the same as being used—if George was being used then he’d feel far worse, this is being denied the thing he needs. It’s not a petty lie or a simple fx, this is Dream flexing the power he has and making sure George knows he’s good at this.*

A glance down. “Taking it so well.”

*There’s a possibility that Dream gets bored of his own pace. He pulls out to the last second once again, holding himself there for far too long, and George starts to think that this is all it’ll be, but he’s proved wrong so quickly, made to love it all by Dream leaning down and snapping his hips forwards.*

*It’s quick, Dream fucking his cock into him and making sure George knows this is as good as sex gets, that if he wants to feel this again then he’ll have to keep crawling back to Dream with his legs already spread and his clothes already off. But George is prepared to try, he doesn’t mind the commitment.*

*Breathing heavily, George moans, the breath being stolen from his own lungs as he tries to keep his thoughts coherent.*

“How does it feel?” Dream asks.

*The pace isn’t brutal yet, but it is fast, reckless almost when Dream’s vice grip gets even tighter. George’s voice bleeds honey, it’s not his own, he took it from the other, but now it’s here to stay, making his lips wet when he runs his tongue along them and attempts to answer Dream’s words.*

“Good,” George whines. “So good.”

*He can hear himself getting louder, moans becoming that much more pornographic as Dream forces them out of him. With a hitching breath, George tries to calm himself down, hoping the slamming of the headboard against the wall isn't telling enough already, but it's useless, there's no way for him to stop.*

*Thankfully Dream notices it too. Three fingers push forwards, Dream jamming them into George's mouth without control, and it's hard for George not to choke as they scrape over his tongue and keep his lips stretched.*

*"God, your mouth." Dream's practically thrusting his fingers in and out, effectively muffling George's moans with his fist. "Next time I want you to suck me off," he mutters. "I want to see those perfect fucking lips wrapped around my cock."*

*The words are followed by a pattern of thrusts, both Dream's hands and his hips working to keep George stuffed full. It's unforgiving, and the pleasure that builds in George's stomach tells all, showing his weaknesses in perfect picture.*

*"Bet you're good at it too," Dream continues, scorn on his face and false disgust in his tone. "You probably sit at home and cockwarm your dildos all day because you like keeping your mouth full."*

*A laugh, not foreign to the ones George has heard before, but far more fruitful.*

*"Next time you can just call me round," Dream suggests. "I'll make sure to keep you gagging on my dick until you're delirious."*

*There are red marks on pale, milky skin—every time that George looks at Dream he can see them. They're fresh, red and newly bitten, and George's teeth ache when he thinks of the way Dream's body felt between them.*

*One breath is sultry, wanton moans being taken by Dream's fingers, and George can't help but bite down on the tip of one to try and regain his freedom. It works, George's own saliva being brushed over his skin as Dream's fingers drop out.*

*The thrusts are perfect, George clenching down against Dream's cock each time, and he doesn't know how to help so he doesn't—staying still and letting his body be torn apart. Mulberry red sits neat on George's face and Dream watches him squirm, jaw slack as he kneels on the end of the bed and pushes in and out, hopeful staccato.*

*"So hot," Dream mumbles. And the thought that pops into his head is plastered over his features, making it so obvious for George's accursed heart to slow while he overcomes fear.*

*It's so dangerous for George to act stable. He feels so good with Dream fucking him and there's no chance he can hide it. There's a part of him that wants to say it, tell Dream exactly how good he makes him feel, but at the same time he likes keeping the allure of being distant, even if it's not quite working.*

*The pace is wavering, as soon as George is used to one thing, Dream makes sure to change it, leaning down to steal George's lips in a kiss and pressing in that much more deeper with George's thighs against his chest.*

*He's so pretty. Every single one of Dream's features seems to be flawlessly crafted, dipped in something supernatural and caramelised where it sits. If there was more time then George would reach forward, connect each dot as though they're a puzzle and he'd kiss Dream again and again as though it's a melody.*

*He'd let Dream fuck him slow, fuck him until moans are all he's capable of, all thoughts having fizzled out because of how good he feels. They'll do this again, and George will love it. The third time will be just as good. But right now, this is the best George has ever felt. It's the first time he's ever done this, and the only time he ever needs to—this memory will be too perfect to ever recreate.*

*"Say my name."*

*Eye contact is bruising. Dream takes George's hair in one hand and pushes it back, out of his face, just so there's nothing to crowd his expression, nothing to hide behind. His hips barely move, he thrusts in slow and hard and makes sure George can feel it—the way Dream's cock twitches inside of him.*

*For a moment, George can't answer, choking on his own breath as soon as he tries to get the words out. And it feels pathetic to be cowering under Dream's touch while he's watched and analysed but there's nothing he can do to stop it. Dream is just allowed to stare while he falls apart on his cock.*

*"Come on, say it," Dream mutters. His head falls down, sweat tracking across his forehead and making dirty blond hair stick to the skin. "Say my name, George."*

*"Dream." He can't breathe, can't think, it's all slipping away and being replaced with pleasure, pink.*

*"Again."*

*The only thing George can do is obey. He accepts fate and let Dream fuck him like he's a toy, made to be used and taken apart with all of his buttons pushed. "Dream."*

*"There you go," Dream cooes, so soft despite it all. "So fucking good for me, George."*

*George can feel everywhere Dream touches, everything he does from the way he holds George's sides to the way his cock throbs. It's so much all at once, and George knows that tomorrow it'll hurt to walk, and that he'll never be able to hide the limp from Sapnap, but in his mind it's all worth it, just because of the way his blood rushes when Dream's happy.*

*"So fucking pretty," Dream mumbles. His chest pushes up, back straightening so he's perpendicular to the other while he continues to move. And George's brain must short circuit for a second, because when he looks at Dream in the dark of the night, and sees the way the stars catch against his skin, it's as close to God as George will ever get.*

*The change in angle only means that George feels as though he's taking more. His hands grasp at the sheets, moving wildly to cling onto something that'll relieve all the tension he feels. At the bottom of his stomach, George's cock bobs up and down, leaking pre-cum onto his skin and aching for release. As much as he wants to reach down and jerk himself off he doesn't—he keeps control.*

*"Poor baby can't even form words," Dream mumbles, more to himself than anything. "Being a good boy and just taking it."*

*"Dream please," George groans, barely even knowing what he's saying. "Harder."*

*He clenches down again, doing his best to keep himself quiet and still letting out a long, hoarse moan.*

*"Fuck," Dream groans. "Should've known you'd be good at this."*



*And George barely even knows what it means. He doesn't know how he's good at something he's never done, but there's no way he'll disagree so he just nods and hopes it's enough. His mind is foggy, brain going numb with all the pleasure, but George is never given the chance to catch up, his thighs tremble and his breathing gets laboured, but his mind never catches up.*

*"Move with me," Dream says, snapping his hips with the darkest intention.*

*At first the words don't really make sense. In George's blurred mind he can't understand what Dream actually wants from him, so instead of doing anything special he just tilts his head away, eyes falling shut when he slurs out a quiet, "What?"*

*"Move your hips," Dream elaborates.*

*He's thrusting in just to show off, leaning back so his whole body is visible to the other, muscles perfectly on display. And it's no different to the Dream that George has always known—the one that's cocky and loves to know he's attractive, so George, even with a dazed mind, rolls his eyes, raspberry melting on his tongue like acid.*

*"Fucking pillow princess," Dream grumbles. "Move Georgie, or I won't."*

*Even the threat is enough to make George writhe. He whimpers immediately, making hasty attempts to reach out and find the other while keeping his brows furrowed and lips in what resembles a pout.*

*"No, Dream please I can't," he grieves, mellowed. "Need you to move."*

*And George can't do this again. There's no way he'll make it through the constant push and pull. If Dream gives him more pleasure only to strip it away, he'll surely be done for. George can feel his eyes start to water, the underline rimmed with red as he starts to tear up, sniffing to try and not let anything slip.*

*"Are you going to cry?" Dream scoffs, sounding more shocked than anything.*

*Aventurine eyes run to George's, seering him with their gaze. A viscous smile is taped to Dream's lips, his lack of movement only probing George to answer the question.*

*In the end George just shakes his head, adamant and not sure if he means it.*

*"Didn't take you for a crier," Dream still presses. It's as though it's his mission to see the tears slip, like he wants to know how George will look with clear blue tears tracking down his cheeks.*

*He never fully stops, still thrusting into George with his own sick mind. There's no telling how it feels for him, how tight George feels while wrapped around his cock, but George's imagination only tells him the best.*

*"Dream please," George tries, sniffing.*

*A single thrust is the thing that makes him lose his mind, finally letting the tears flow freely and ruin his entire composure. It has to be intentional, how Dream suddenly changes the angle to press onto the bundle of nerves that makes George scream, his prostate being hit dead on and just barely nudged. If it lasted any longer then George would surely be over, spilling onto his chest without even being touched, but it wasn't and George is only left wanting more.*

*It's a collapse in emotion. George doesn't quite know what to do, but Dream makes sure he's still relaxed, using his thumbs to press lightly on George's skin and press in little patterns with the*

*indents.*

*"It's okay baby," Dream reassures him. "Just do this one thing for me, okay?"*

*George nods, pathetic. He'll cringe at the memory later but right now he can't think far enough to care.*

*"Just roll your hips against mine," Dream instructs, noting George's expression and matching it with blue concern. "You can do it."*

*"Can't," George mumbles, eyes to the ceiling as he lets himself sob with pleasure.*

*"If you need to stop, just tell me," Dream says. "But now, tell me if you think you can do it, and if you can't, I'll do the rest of the work, okay?"*

*The whine that George lets out is more of a cry than anything else. He knows he still wants more, and he needs Dream to move the way he has been doing, so he nods, hoping he has the energy to do well enough for the other and prove he can really be good enough.*

*"So can you do it?" Dream asks.*

*Another nod, being met by a hard gaze and raised brows.*

*"Words, Georgie."*

*There's no way out of it. Dream refuses to move without confirmation and George has never been good with confrontation. The only thing that manages to make George change is the feeling of Dream's cock inside of him, a small movement that reminds him of everything.*

*"I can do it," George chokes. "Just please don't make me wait."*

*And Dream doesn't. He hoists George's legs up higher, leaning forwards to slam into him at every off-beat. It's too quick, so fucking fast that George barely knows how to react but still he's doing his best to abide to Dream's wishes, grinding back down against him so they're both putting in a less than equal effort.*

*It's one thrust after another, jolting George forward with the bed's frame as it slams against the wall with repeated thuds. It's loud and obnoxious and George has heard it before, but when the breath is being punctured from his lungs he can't really think back to being jealous.*

*"Dream," he moans, gasping desperately into the dry air.*

*Moans get louder, George being ruined by the way he's fucked. It's hard and it's deep and it's so fast it'd be impossible to keep up. His thighs shake, clear in Dream's view, and his head is tilted so far back that his throat is bare and ready to be taken.*

*Dream's pace is animalistic. He's throwing everything forwards, doing his very best to make sure George will never walk again. Each brush against his prostate makes George scream, sex in Dream's eyes as he fucks George into delirium. There's no remorse in his motions, he wants to make George feel it, wants him to be loud despite the way he pretends he doesn't. And it works so well to make George sob, because that's exactly what he does, he cries pretty and makes feeble attempts to bat away the tears with his own clumped eyelashes.*

*"I'm close," George mewls, cock aching so badly that there's no way he'll last for much longer.*

*“Yeah?” Dream breathes, heavy with exertion. “Me too.”*

*He thrusts again, fast, dark, so unforgiving that George can only twist on a whim and hope he doesn't lose it all in an instant.*

*“Together?”*

*All that George can do is nod. He's being fucked so beautifully, Dream's cock twitching inside of him as it hammers against his prostate without mercy. The chance of him lasting much longer dwindles with every second. He's writhing and gasping on the sheets, fucking himself back on Dream's lap while each thrust leaves him breathless.*

*“I'll tell you when,” Dream twines.*

*He's ruthless and George can't take it. He knows he can't do it for much longer. Tear stained skin catches on the light, the sheets on Dream's bed being ruined by sweat and need and all the things that George doesn't know how to hide.*

*“I can't hold on,” he admits with a moan, words sticky and magenta.*

*“You can,” Dream presses.*

*It's pleasure that surges through George's body, making him weak even though he's electric. Helplessness is all he feels, nirvana coming second, and George isn't too sure how he got here but he's there now and Dream is his. They're giving themselves to each other and there's absolutely no going back.*

*“Dream.”*

*“Just a few more seconds baby,” Dream groans. “So good, I'm so lucky to have you.”*

*This is ecstasy. This is the feeling that George will never be rid of, the one that burns like fire and scalds like the hottest waters. It's nothing short of red, determination like crimson, and George sobs and he chokes and he keeps his arms wrapped tight around Dream's back to never let him go.*

*It's pleasure itself—pleasure in its purest form—the fruitless squirming doing nothing to stop the sounds from slipping out of George's throat, loud and unabashed, and if Sapnap can hear him then he can believe it's someone else, because George is too far gone to really give a fuck.*

*“Close,” Dream says again.*

*The sound of his voice is euphonious. He drags George back from the edge over and over again, and keeps his legs dangling over the end. It's as fine as honey will ever get, kindling a flame as he whispers dirty, dirty words into George's ear.*

*“Fuck George,” he groans, a mantra on his lips when he thrusts. “George, god.”*

*One hand is pushed between their bodies, it's slick and wet with lube and George's back arches so impossibly high when it wraps around his cock and fists him slowly with the aid of the pre-cum that's already fallen. It's tight, and Dream strokes him with the twist of his hand, making sure not to stay too predictable as he does it all.*

*There's no possible way to describe it but George doesn't think anything will ever beat this, so he whines and breathes and lets himself be used to his full ability. The tears cascade down his face, salt on his tongue as it mixes with sugar and still tastes amazing—George having to blink a few*

*times before he can feel his humanity rushing back.*

*“Now,” Dream gasps—it’s the most raw that George has ever heard him.*

*“Dream.”*

*White heat rushes through George’s body in an instant, forcing the whole world to go blank as he does everything but scream. His eyes roll back, toes curling as Dream makes sure to hit his prostate through the heights of his orgasm, and it’s the most sensitive that George has ever felt so he doesn’t know how to do anything other than shake.*

*Every muscle in his body goes limp, his body collapsing when Dream fucks him through it—through the aftershocks and the bliss, and it’s so hazy that George is in rapture. It feels as though it lasts forever, George spills into Dream’s hand and feels his own cum hit his chest where it falls sticky and wet, and even though it’s over Dream keeps on going, spilling inside of George when his own orgasm hits and it takes everything to keep moving.*

*“Oh George,” Dream groans.*

*Post orgasm bliss hits in an instant. It makes George writhe, small whimpers slipping through his lips because he doesn’t have enough energy to moan in full. And even after it’s seemingly over, Dream isn’t done, thrusting with less force but still riding out his high, fucking himself to completion.*

*“Slow down,” George whines. “Sensitive.”*

*Showing mercy, Dream starts to pull out, staying still for half a second before reaching down to hold the base of his cock and withdraw from George’s body. Unintentionally, George’s face twists up, feeling Dream’s cock slip out of him as it goes fully soft and lets cum fall from George’s ruined self.*

*There’s still hands on his body, keeping small pockets warm, and Dream smiles like nothing’s changed, like they just spent the last hour hugging and not tearing each other apart.*

*“Sorry,” Dream whispers, although he doesn’t really mean it. “I want to keep touching you though.”*

*“You’ve touched me enough,” George laughs.*

*His legs are moved around, Dream slowly shifting so they’ll both fit on the bed as he collapses down against it and tries to meet George’s eyes. Even that movement feels tough, George’s entire body feeling weak as he lies in his own mess and can’t be motivated enough to fix it.*

*“How many times have you had sex that good?” He asks, so arrogant.*

*And perhaps it’s dumb but George is feeling open. He has no filter in his mind and no way of telling right from wrong when he’s so light-headed, so he turns into Dream’s warmth and lets a lazy smirk rest on his lips.*

*“Never.”*

*“So would you say that I’m better than everyone else you’ve had sex with?”*

*A laugh gets trapped in George’s throat. “Idiot,” he mumbles. “No. That was...”*

*He cuts himself off, pensive.*

*But Dream wants to know. For whatever reason, he reaches out and pushes a strand of hair out of George's face, trying to get a clear view when he asks, "That was what?"*

*Silence.*

*"That was the first time I've had sex." A simple confession. George doesn't want to give himself the time to be embarrassed. "There's no one for you to be better than."*

*Somehow the room gets colder.*

*"That was your first time?" Dream asks, distance in his tone. To say his face goes white would be an understatement. If anything, from the tips of his hair to the shelled pinks of his skin, Dream's being changes immediately, even his posture making George flinch back in a drawn out movement.*

*George's arm is shaken off of Dream's waist when Dream gets up, breathing to himself as his eyes dart from object to object and land everywhere but on George. He has no idea what's going on, what exactly happened to cause such a shift in Dream's mood, but he's scared, scared and unsure on how to change back.*

*"Yeah," he whispers, dusted and silver. "Dream, are you okay?"*

*"Yeah, just..." The words die on Dream's tongue, trail off into something incomprehensible. "Just stay there, I should get something to clean you up."*

*"Yeah, we wouldn't want Sapnap seeing me like this," George chuckles with no laughter, turning to lie on one side and stare at the other.*

*The only view he gets is of Dream's back, him slouching forwards and running a hand through his hair.*

*"Dream, are you sure there isn't something wrong?" George asks.*

*There's no telling whether it's just to please him or if George is just being dramatic, still, Dream shakes his thoughts like fireflies, glancing up and then turning back to face the other with nothing obvious plastered on his face.*

*"I'm fine," Dream smiles, leaning over to press a chaste kiss against his mouth, all cherry and smiles, and honey even if it's more forced than usual. "Just try not to fall asleep on me."*

*George nods. He's on the brink of unease, sliding over the edge with only his wits to keep him stable. And George isn't dumb, he knows there's something wrong, that in the last few minutes a switch has flipped in Dream's brain that's made his smile pained and hands shake, but he's not smart enough to know what it is, figure out how to help.*

*He's probably just overthinking it, being dramatic when there's absolutely no need to be. So he tries not to fret, a hand on his leg when he pushes the side of his face into Dream's pillow and lets his heart get that much messier.*

*"Goodnight," he mumbles, bones crashing with sleep immediately. It courses through his veins, forcing his eyelids to droop as he watches Dream sit and stare with no control over how his body fails him.*

*"Goodnight," Dream smiles. "Sweet dreams, George."*

## Chapter End Notes

comments/kudos are appreciated !! they really make my day, and i love going through comments for motivation to write <3

Thank you for reading and ty to [flame](#) for beta-ing this chapter as always.

I guess the explicit rating has made itself clear now, i *am* a smut writer at heart so i hope the sex was written well? If it wasn't, then i deserve for all my user subs to be taken from me, smut is where i started, and it's where i'll end, so i hope this chapter was good?

[My twitter](#)

## Chapter 8

### Chapter Summary

He touches his waist like he's a man close to death, in the presence of divinity with nothing to do other than worship—tip-toe across a tightrope like he'll fall if he touches and crash if he doesn't. George lets it all happen though, even if it makes him frown, because outside of that door there's quiet and then there's road. Nothing bad can happen to them out there.

### Chapter Notes

small cw warning for mentions of cheating, no cheating actually happens and i want to make that clear, but it's a mentioned thing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's a dying morning, when George wakes up, reborn.

The skies are dark—heavens riddled with the blacks and blues that allow the world to slumber, colours that bring out quiet and cool warmth in excess.

It's so silent, and everything feels aloof. Like even the birds have been told not to sing for dire repercussions have been wrapped red around their necks, sharp, just to threaten. Often George likes that distance, for even with nothingness infecting the air, it's still that perfect part of the night where no singular thing matters. Liminal space where George can wake up foggy, dazed, confused and see a room that isn't his own, only feeling his legs as they refuse to move because of pure weakness.

Kindling a flame in bare hands is difficult. George's mind grows heavy with the effort it takes to not let the fire shake and flick yellow embers onto the sheets of Dream's bed. *Dream's bed*, not his. George is incessantly sitting unclothed on his almost-boyfriend's mattress, still with sticky alabaster skin and brown hair that's been pushed back and pulled so much that it's permanently out of shape. A part of him is giddy about the whole thought.

Yesterday is a blur.

He remembers soft skin on tender white, the way he gasped when being touched with an expertise that doesn't make him angry, instead reminds him that out of everyone, Dream chose him; Dream wants to be with George and George alone. But aside from sex, the day is fuzzy. George can barely remember how it started or the final moments that indicated its sugared end.

Somehow, the room is warm.

It's gotten to a time where George would assume the heating is off, no family wanting to be running extra power this late. But it might just be black sheets, body-heat from a torso that runs so

hot that George knows he won't need to invest in a bigger duvet next winter.

The frost on the headrest almost makes him flinch when he shuffles up, letting rose wrapped skin meet with the back and for bare skin to finally touch the cold. A singular smile glows in darkness, likely lined with plum pink when George bites his own lips and pretends that this isn't the aftermath of ecstasy.

Against the sheets, Dream is quiet.

His head is buried into a pillow, arms wrapped around George's waist to try and pull him back down. He's strong. George almost relents. It's simply the slope of a bare back, the indent in the middle, and the sharpness of shoulder blades in movement, that's gorgeous. George might just be the luckiest man on the planet.

But darkness harbours the thoughts he can't quite be rid of.

The dirt of last night is glued to his skin, final words itching the back of his mind as though there's something that he doesn't entirely remember. And it's not the cutest thing to say of course but quite frankly, George needs to take a piss. So sitting in Dream's bed, disjointed in amber tones, can't last forever.

Getting up is quick, stealing a sweatshirt that isn't his own only comes with the rustling of black linen.

The hoodie that George takes falls far past his wrists. Dream is tall. If George knows anything it's that he only owns black, if the minimal specks of colour on his band shirts are overlooked. And George knows that the shade makes him look flushed, even more muted than usual, but the inside is fuzzy and the smell is calming, so he doesn't mind looking pale under soft fabrics.

Dream doesn't have his own bathroom. Risk feels far less futile in the earliest hours of a morning.

Yesterday's high makes his footsteps light, floorboards barely bending under a body's weight when he moves to the door and only looks twice before stepping out into an endless hallway. If it's possible, it's far darker out here than in Dream's room, a pitiful source of light coming from a window at the end of the road.

Moonlight bends across the wallpaper and creeps snow under the frame of each door. Inexplicably, it makes George feel as though he's not trespassing on blackened ground.

Breathe slow. Move undetectable—stealth in grey even though there's no guilt to rival it in raspberry blue.

Four walls stare at George as he roams through a house that isn't his own. He passes photo frames and creaking floors, all while pretending he doesn't feel the eternal sin shackling him with weights that he'll have to carry for the rest of his life. It's wrong and he knows it. George *knows* he should be thinking of this as a mistake, especially now he and Sapnap are on good terms, but Dream is treating him right and George doesn't want to pass up on that opportunity. A better friend would understand.

One step, two. Boxers that are too big and a sweatshirt that has a collar so loose it shows off the dip of pointed collarbones. George keeps his breathing to a low mute.

The hallway is loud—it echoes, spitting bloodied words like saccharine has sweetened the metallic taste until it's bearable.



Though he can hear nothing against the dullness of his own mind. This is a grave melody, silvered affection still present in the hands that were ghosting up his stomach and wrapping around his waist only yesterday. Right now, he's so far gone. So unbelievably fucked over that there's no point in even trying to run.

He finds the bathroom in dishevelment, glowing gold like he wants to rival the stars. Hopefully, that ambition won't wake the other rooms.

Renaissance hands close a door with a gentle press. The lock being turned and the light being switched on, drowning him in pale blue and a tangerine glow.

George has been in this bathroom before, obviously. This house he's visited a thousand times. But on every other occasion he spent the night in a different room, taking Sapnap's bed and his blankets and forcing the other onto the floor just because he could. So he remembers the layout, how the shower is almost as big as his whole house and the bath is separate and on the opposite corner.

Alas, what George did not remember is the fact they have a crystal clear mirror that takes up an entire wall, from head to toe.

In all honesty, he looks awful. Liquid gold sits in his lungs as he inhales sharply and tries to piece himself back together, struck with shock and awe at the state he's gotten himself into. The mirror holds the memory of George's fall, the shaking and the sounds, everything he's been holding on repeat like the moonlight will echo the thoughts for dangerous ears to observe.

Now he stands with a soreness in his legs and no reason to be plagued. There's something better than remorse in his future.

"*Fuck,*" he breathes.

Red are the marks on George's neck. Purple are the indents that pointed teeth have left.

He looks as though he's been mauled, deep scarlet running bruises in the shapes of cherry stalks up his skin. And Dream must be an animal, that's the only explanation for this, because on any other day George would never be able to recognise the person in the mirror as himself.

It's too filthy, too wanton, to be him.

The figure in the glass looks like he's been taken apart and left without any self respect—teased with pathetic lust then abandoned so he can sleep it off in a carmine hurry. George barely remembers the lips on his neck. He can't possibly think of a time where Dream had the chance to leave him in such ruins, but what he does remember is how it had felt when a tongue was pressed against the spot under his jaw.

Each touch managed to make him writhe, and gasp, and fall so far past grace.

"God." Light fingers press against his neck. "How the fuck am I going to cover these?"

After contemplating, he decides that he won't. Going out to buy concealer or a colour to contrast will be embarrassing in itself. Nevertheless, George doesn't panic. He stares at his reflection and reasons with himself for a good few minutes before deciding that there's no reason to feel humiliated, not if Dream's by his side.

Demurity is born out of optimism. The craving that George did during the night will mean he'll never have the emotional reticency that he'd effortlessly performed before. Now, he stands

branded. Skin still holding that perfect pink sheen like humility has finally crawled it's way back.

Pride. Obsession.

And it's when he stares at himself and sees no change to angled features or extra freckle on alabaster skin, that George is once again struck by sudden realisation.

Dream is asleep in the next room over, and George is in the bathroom, fretting over the fact that he isn't a virgin anymore. After eons, it's his first day on the other side and other than initial shock, he feels no different. Like this moment—the one he's been building up to for almost all of his life—has no pivotal effect on him. It's any other day.

Maybe it was stupid to have thought that having sex would make him feel different, like he's been changed for the better just because he sat on Dream's dick. But George can see himself in the mirror and when he thinks, he still does it with a stupid sort of trepidation. Sex can't have been that life-changing, even if it was more important than words will ever understand, George is still the same person. He almost feels wrong for wishing he wasn't.

The revelation leaves him with indifference.

He stands eye to eye with his reflection. Hearing how outside there is nothing but an open world.

Quite simply, George is glad that this is how he lost it, on Dream's bed during a night like any other. One where he was treated with fervour by a guy that'll never show him off to the family. Because maybe there weren't candles, or rose petals, or heartfelt mumblings that are born from sick stomachs and the need to please, but there was Dream and there was George. Connected in harmony throughout the tears.

And it wasn't just one night. Now he's here, and George knows that it's no longer possible to try and equate this to a simple cherry crush, to pomegranate lips holding lies that burst like berries as they pushed against each other and couldn't keep quiet.

This will be the end of him. Destruction holding hands with death. It feels so impossibly right.

Sin runs through George's head, every single sticky toffee word that Dream has ever uttered, tearing all thoughts away like it's just sport, fun. Sickness tells George that it still isn't enough. Humanity tells him that nothing ever will be.

But he touches his bruises and sees the way Dream devoured him. He locks eyes with his hickeys and can tell how much the best thing in his life had wanted to scar him with his touch. This is the remnants of desire—passion has never been so apparent.

He breathes again. Above his head, stuck to the ceiling, the light flickers as a reminder that it's still there.

George will have to explain these marks eventually; when he gets home his parents will likely be camped at the door, prepared with questions that George will be forced to answer, but the truth is bendable. He'll tell them he's just been out, and he'll be able to tell Sapnap words that don't meet umber eyes—ones that explain cardinal bruises without the truth of ivory teeth and brutally tender sounds. Sometimes he impresses himself with his deception.

Nobody needs to know the details but him and Dream, they were the ones that experienced each honeyed second and they're the ones that are bound to repeat it time and time again.

George looks at himself in the mirror once more.

He'll work things out. Everyone has secrets, that's normal. And besides, George is happy, dull minded, possibly dazed, and with clouded thoughts that don't even come back to him properly, but he's still happy. He's taken.

So he sneaks back out of the bathroom and walks to Dream's room, letting the door creak shut behind him as he clambers into the warmth of an occupied bed. Dream tugs him close in his slumber and George just lets him. They're perfect in the dark, untouchable.

Blameless, unblemished, blue, George goes back to sleep.

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This time when he wakes up, it's not of his own accord.

With his arms around someone else's waist, he stirs. It's nothing too jarring, the sight of morning light and tan skin so oddly domestic that it could never feel hollow, but it's enough to make George disoriented for a single second before he blinks open his eyes to see a golden smile.

"Hey Georgie," Dream hums, brushing a stray hair from the other's forehead.

His hand is warm and George wants to lean into the touch. The ghost of comfort, like Dream is sprinkling stardust onto everything he dares to feel, tentative and fruitless—he's already left such harsh marks.

"Dream," he slurs, voice thick with rest and a tone lower than the one he normally keeps. "Were you watching me sleep?"

Pearly teeth shine white. Dream smiles with pink lips and lets his thoughts linger around him in the same colour, so obvious, even to the untrained eye.

"Kind of," he admits. "You looked pretty." He sees what he does and grins wider when George tries to hide his face back into the pillow. "Even prettier when you blush."

"Shut up," he grumbles, although he could never really mean it.

Now that he's awake in the presence of one, rather than lying in dark shadows by himself it's far easier to forget: forget how he's stayed long past his welcome, how his lithe frame won't hold under the other's dark stare for much longer. The urge to stay makes George turn, looking up through long eyelashes to see the other, with black snake bites and a little hoop in his ear, something gold, something shiny—a reminder that Dream is far beyond any of the other marvels that George has ever known.

Nectar burns George's tongue when he smiles. He doesn't want to feel this weak but he does. It's almost as though the mere thought of sleeping next to Dream has turned him soft.

"I can't," Dream grins, dipping down to lie a little closer. It seems he's having the same thought. "Not when you make me feel all fuzzy inside. I think you've ruined me, Georgie."

When he moves towards George, the sheets move with him, curving around his torso as he attempts to cage in the other—still bare-chested with so much on show; George hates to admit that he's disappointed to see the other has pulled on a pair of grey boxers while he was asleep.

"I hate you," he mumbles.

Arms bend. Dream is so close that his forehead is touching the other's. He's still a tease at heart.

There's no telling how wide George's pupils are blown, because he's only just come back to consciousness and being immediately met with his wildest fantasies was bound to drive him insane. Sex and like and a guy that makes him feel safe.

But he can't lean forward. He needs to go before the rest of the house wakes up and they're both fucked for eternity. Nevertheless, it seems that Dream doesn't want to make things easy.

He pouts, pushing his lips out to try and guide the other in. "Kiss."

And on any other day George would let himself be flawed. "*Dream*," he whines instead, turning to the side so he won't be convinced. "You can't start something right now."

The way in which he says it must show weakness, because Dream just sighs and presses wet lips to his neck, tracing over the marks he left the day before with such feeble force.

"Why not?" He asks, light, mocking. A cold hand comes to rest on George's side, ever so slightly trying to push up his shirt. "I bet you're still so open for me, can I see?"

The softness of touch. The cracking of willpower as it's pried away by pinkened lips.

"Dream," George mumbles, hands coming up to grab at dirty blond strands so he can stop the other from continuing his attack.

Yet it doesn't work. He feels Dream's hips slowly grinding down against his, messy, messy words being spoken like they're simple.

"George," he pleads, teeth snagging on his earlobe as he tries to speak. Hands on the other's skin, grabbing and pulling and coming down to feel his ass after the every curve of his tottering body. "God, I want to eat you out. You'll let me right? Bet you taste so good."

He says it like he means it, like there's nothing Dream wants more than to have George writhing on the sheets, fucking himself on his tongue with cherry red moans dripping like strawberry syrup from his throat. It's too early for this, George knows that Dream's talk will get him riled up and now that they've actually had sex there's nothing stopping him from inviting it once more.

But he can't let himself give in so easily. He needs to go home, find something oversized enough to cover each piece of evidence, and yet with Dream on him like this, it's so hard to think straight.

He turns his head to the side, groaning when Dream tries to pull him into a kiss and only lands on his cheek. "Shut up, I hate you."

"Can I?" Dream pouts. Possessive fingers trail down, they squeeze George's ass in clothes that lay too big and press red in the shape of small blotches against already-bruising skin. "Please."

It'd be a lie to say the motions aren't convincing. They're quick and they're rushed, and it's that addictive kind of warmth that George feels running dark through his veins as two bodies stay stuck in place. The air welcomes words and George's mind fosters blue thoughts, the type of thoughts that tell him one night will never be enough, that Dream is willing to give himself over in body and in form, and George would be a fool for not taking it while he can.

An end isn't imminent. This doesn't have to be it.

So George resists. “Dream I need to go,” he whines, pink pumped lies in the rumble of his tone. “It’s almost eight.”

“Another hour won’t hurt.” Said with spit slick lips, teeth clasp onto broken red while dark eyes take their pick at the pieces of George’s soul. He’s so close to giving in, allowing Dream to lead him back into divine pleasure and messed sheets, but it seems as though the other doesn’t think his plan is going to work, so instead of allowing George to go back on his more rational thoughts, he simply withdraws with a muttered, humorous, “Fine.”

Punishment comes in the form of stripped sheets. Cold, and the absence of hands. George is forced into the shadows while Dream watches, grey.

Though he refuses to let the emotion bleed onto pointed features, George falters. Scrutiny lasts for mere seconds and judgement trickles away like beads of ice on a golden chalice. His fingers are curled around the base, ready to spill honey on his own frame to see if Dream will peel away his shirt and bathe him back to presentability. He doesn’t do it yet though; this can wait, it can always wait.

Unquestioned, poised, George waits before finding his own clothes. They’re likely on the floor, in a pile that no well-respected man will bend over to try and find. But George is dishevelled, and George is pathetic, these saccharine kisses and the image of Dream sitting up with a lean figure on show, will surely lead to George dragging off the sweatshirt that isn’t his and the boxers that don’t belong to him too. Pale skin and trembling thighs. Naked. Exposed. Enough for Dream to ogle. Enough for him to want.

One more second can’t hurt. They’ve already gone this far.

Standing is done on shaking legs. Everything is pink, so, so fuzzy and melting like the world’s last memory of the two will be of them with tangled limbs—their legacy will be sweetness in deceit. It will be George turning away from the other with his arms low and guard lower. It will be Dream watching with a heart that not even Sapnap knew he was capable of.

Consumed by scarlet and sugar, George strips.

“I’m still hard,” Dream grumbles, innocence in such filthy words, almost like he’s not watching George perform because it’ll ruin him for life.

The look Dream has on his face is nauseating, ivory teeth tugging on his lower lip and dragging dark snake bites back so they dip into his mouth and come out wet. Black spikes, tan skin, and *god* George is going to need Dream to put on a shirt before he does something that he might regret.

It’s no help that the early morning sits heavy on George’s shoulders. He’s susceptible to his own self-destruction, watching Dream wrap his legs around the sheets and pull them into his lap, tangling things together until it’s all bare skin and pale stretches, traces of muscle poking out from his thighs and his legs, and more importantly, his arms.

The bite of his throat is red. The spot just underneath his Adam’s apple that normally rings with alabaster, no longer is. At some point in a foggy night, George must have rubbed raspberry, either from the shape of his mouth or his fingertips, along the stretch. A claim to declare something as his that he can’t even remember making.

Lust isn’t a trait that George can just accept.

When he looks at Dream, and how his boxers are tented, hands are sculpted from smooth grey

stone, George is too mind-numbingly reminded of the bliss of the night to stay strong and get dressed. Blond hair is far too tempting.

He watches as Dream's hands trail down, dipping into his own underwear and travelling over hot, flushed skin. It feels far dirtier to watch Dream do it in secret. Even if the other knows he's not alone, amber eyes being glued to the slightest of movement, rough connection and slow, slow strokes, feels so wrong, so amazingly wrong.

Still, George is barely able to pass his own libido.

"I thought you said no sex?"

"I can still jerk it," Dream laughs, aventurine eyes flicking up to meet George's gaze. "Right?"

And nothing feels as good as giving in—that, George has learned first-hand.

"With me here?" He asks, knowing the answer for it's painted in gold and plastered on every wall.

"If that's okay?" Dream's grabbing lube. He's letting George see the way his shoulder blades stick out and how his back dips when he moves his arms and stretches to grab a bottle off the side-table. "I mean I could take a cold shower if you really want, but something tells me you'd rather watch."

And George—being that pitiful description of helplessness that he's always been—doesn't even think about it. It's not just *sex*, it's not greedy commitment in a way that stops him from leaving the room and listening to the sense that tells him this isn't safe. This is something that sits like trust and makes George's cheeks flush with heated embarrassment, his want overriding the fact he was so close to the door.

"You can..." George's eyes fall down. "...yeah."

Below Dream's waist is still covered by the sheets. Hesitantly, George stands in place, wondering if he's meant to come closer or stay upright while the air nips blue into his skin. He's on display. A pretty thing for Dream to look at while he jacks off and pretends that real life responsibilities don't exist.

The moment that he pulls himself out of his underwear, George forgets how to breathe. It may only have been last night, but he had almost forgotten how Dream looks with his hand wrapped around his cock, lube slicking his movements as he leans back and lets his ear almost fall to his shoulder.

"*Fuck*," he groans, twisting his hand and squeezing like he knows exactly how to work himself into incoherence. "So pretty standing there. You can come closer, you know?"

Tone weak, eyes down, George whispers, "I need to get dressed."

"5 more minutes," Dream protests. "C'mon, spin for me."

George has filthy memories lying heavy at the front of his mind. The way in which Dream pulled him apart last night—with soft breaths and warm skin, making no attempt to move away from the other's touch—will always be the most important. Because even though he'll never have his first time again, George still knows he can take more, that Dream has so much left to give.

So he spins slowly, allowing Dream's eyes to run over the straight lines and minimal curves that shape his body. And it's not a test anymore, George knows that Dream is looking, so he lets beet red run disgracefully across his features, pristine form being ruined by embarrassment and cranberry humiliation.

“I’m so lucky,” Dream mumbles.

His thumb runs over the head of his cock, hips bucking up just slightly so he can fuck into his own fist and watch George while he does it. The other’s eyes must be wide, his stare must be dumbfounded. Hot water has been thrown over him and he has no idea how to stop it from staining, just that his teeth are chewing on his own lip and his bruises are reddening again from the simple memory of being pliable.

One of the worst things about having someone who can read him so well, is that there’s no hiding when Dream decides to play dirty. When Dream lets out a gasp and throws his head back so his jaw points skyward, Adam’s apple bobbing when he gulps and his chest rises with hushed breaths, George freezes. Perhaps getting hard again in the middle of the morning wasn’t ideal.

It’s like a pressure low in his stomach, something that aches and hurts and causes red carmine to run to the heights of his cheeks. This is different to yesterday, where the night and the evening was rushed and fuelled by frenzy—the undying urge to rip taut clothes from sweaty bodies, press hot kisses to familiar skin that were so hard they drew blood, today differs in its likeness.

Now, they’re in light. Minimal, amber, but light nonetheless. And George can see the trembling of his own hands as Dream beckons him over, onto the bed, onto his lap, under the scrutinising eyes that always seem to know all.

“You can touch,” Dream reassures, gravel in the pits of his tone.

He’s so warm.

George is naked, Dream is practically the same.

Inviting, Dream uses his pinky to guide one of George’s fingers forward, bringing his whole hand along with him to make a reach towards the other’s cock. Before, he barely saw it, but now, as he slowly knocks Dream’s hand away and takes it into his own grip, it’s impossible not to look.

“Fuck,” George breathes.

It’s heavy, because of course it is. And Dream is definitely girthier than he is long, with George’s fingers only just meeting at the base—although it’s hard to tell if that’s just because he has small hands or because Dream is twitching in his palm. They’re fused in a way, with a palm coming to rest on the low of George’s back and pull him forward so there’s no other option than to rest their foreheads together and breathe in the same sickly sweet air.

So despite all caution, and the magenta thoughts that have been running rampant around the planes of George’s mind, he lets himself ease into it. First by taking the lube from beside their limbs, second by squeezing it cold onto the head of Dream’s cock and laughing at the way the other hisses.

“You dick,” Dream grunts, not doing anything when George tries to change the angle, guiding his hand up and squeezing to make himself known.

Eye contact is fleeting, bruising. It’s like Dream wants to watch George falter, laugh at the way he burns pink as if he’s the one getting touched. But holding Dream like this is already intimacy nearing its final form, and George may not like to admit it, but he still loves the way he’s put him on edge, never allowed to let a day fizzle out and become dull.

“A little faster,” Dream instructs. “You can hold a bit tighter too.”

There's no harm in doing as asked. George makes sure to twist up then down, thumbing over the head and doing the exact same thing he would to himself in the hopes that it'll work on Dream too. It's not the first time he's given a handjob, far from it, but it's the first time where he's been so engrossed in the idea of getting to see the other fall apart in pink lace strings, that he's been willing to make sure he never fucks up.

Dream will remember him by the shape of his hands and the softness of his lips. He'll always remember how George leans in and lets his teeth nip at the skin right under the junction of the neck that's perfectly on show. While the other gasps, and twitches and tries to force George's chin up into a kiss, George just continues, hoping that the stardust in front of his eyes is in a similar place for Dream as well.

"There. Keep doing that."

And it's not long before George's sight starts to roam.

He's almost antsy, sitting on Dream's lap like this, tasting sugar on the other's lips but reacting like it's acid, rolling into the abyss when Dream's head rolls back and his chest pushes forward. Disconnecting their lips comes with a groan, a sound of disapproval both from him and the guy sitting pretty on his bed while his body is made malleable. And the only logical next step is for George to press his forehead against Dream's chest, with sweat and with rose and all the things that make him human.

Ridiculous, is the fact that there was once a time in which George refused to let himself feel this way, tainted by the feeling of burning skin and sleepy eyes. They're in their own cloud, their own personal bubble, big enough and strong enough for Dream to let out his muffled sounds and for George to lap up every one like they're his personal ambrosia, hand-crafted by the gods for him and him alone to drink.

He looks at Dream and he stares at the way he disappears into his fist, pre-cum pooling at the tip and falling onto slender fingers. This sight should be illegal. It shouldn't be possible to be this attractive with only the bend of a waist, that and veins with prominent dips that trail up to his v-line.

In essence, it's not the image. There's nothing that separates one body from another, George could scour this whole town and find plenty men with figures like Dream, egos just as big and dicks even bigger. But no one will make him feel as sought for, as wanted. Because Dream is the composer and George is his instrument, they fit, it's only natural to be obsessed with the thing he's built for.

"Is this okay?" George asks, leaning down, because he needs to taste at least once, feel Dream everywhere even if the world doesn't stop for him to do it.

Brown hair falls into his eyes, blinding him from the imminent hands that will come to grip at the locks and see his pathetic expression.

This is desperation, Dream falling apart at the very seams by George's inexperienced hand. Pride shouldn't be what courses through him, heavy and hot, but it does and George is drunk on the feeling—the very thing that tells him how deep Dream is into this and how eagerly George is by his side.

He looks up through clumped eyelashes and finally meets the other's eye, torso on Dream's legs and lips pink while pursed in anticipation. "Dream?"

The call of his name is enough to bring the other back to reality.



“Of course it is, *shit*.”

Mottled cranberry dies on the tip of his tongue as George wraps his lips around the head of his cock. Only taking in the tip because that’s all he trusts himself to do without choking. It’s different to how he expected, far more weighty and it definitely doesn’t taste *good*, but he almost likes it. That, or he likes the way it makes Dream react.

“Oh George,” he sighs, relaxed, tinted with purple. “There you go, don’t take too much.”

Black painted nails push George’s hair behind his ear, trying to get a good look of his face as he attempts to take more into his mouth and almost gags in the process. The whole time, he keeps one hand wrapped around the base, feeling his lips start to sting and eyes begin to water as he takes more than he can handle—ending up with him letting out a strangled gasp as Dream’s leg pushes between his.

And Dream’s cock throbs. It fucking *throbs*, dark desire making movement hazy and light fuzz with demonic harmony.

This is milk skin and red marks. This is being undressed and being wanted, gilded limbs and thick fingers that are good enough to make slender thighs tremble, lashes flutter as ecstasy is pumped in unfaltering waves into another’s body. Kisses may be gentle but George knows they won’t be forever, not when he’s sucking Dream’s dick and savouring the taste like he’s starving.

“George,” Dream mutters. “I’m so close.”

And it feels like an invitation to go, like he doesn’t actually need to take it down his throat on the first try because George may be curious but he’s also partial to breathing, and he doesn’t know how well he can do that with Dream’s cock still stretching out his lips, causing that dull ache to sit stagnant and silver at the connectors of his jaw.

Calloused fingers pull him back, tugging sharp at the strands of George’s hair to guide him away, and as soon as they let go, Dream is cumming, falling so perfectly over the edge that George wishes he could hear that moan forever.

Then he feels it.

In reality, it might be his fault. George’s own problem for not pulling away fast enough or jumping from the edge of the cliff after he’s pushed the other off too. But as Dream’s cock lands heavy on his cheek, completely purposeful, and cum lands on his lips and his cheek and even in his eyelashes, clumping them together while he sours at the taste, George can only blame the other.

“Ew,” he whines, sitting back on soft thighs. “That’s so fucking gross.”

Dream only laughs.

“You’re the one that tried to take it down your throat,” he says without much reassurance.

“Doesn’t exactly taste like roses, does it?”

“I want a shower,” George grumbles.

Leaning into Dream’s touch shouldn’t feel so natural. Orange shouldn’t be calming and friendship shouldn’t trickle into romance as well as it does. Somehow, Dream has mastered all of the arts that matter.

“You don’t want me to return the favour?” He asks, wiping his like from George’s face and just

barely resisting the urge to press a finger into his mouth while he's at it. (George can see the dusted thought materialise right before it disappears in lusted black behind his pupils.)

There's no doubt that George is hard. It's a miracle that he doesn't pop a boner every time he sees dirty blond hair and snake bites that definitely shouldn't be as attractive as they are, but this isn't something that they need to rush. They're both hazy, dazed, gorgeous. It's lovely.

There's no requirement for Dream to wrap his fist around George and come down astonishingly fast from his shaking high. He doesn't need to make George feel good for him to want to stay. Sometimes, it's enough to want the other's presence, life as a result of mutual secrecy.

So when George speaks he can do it with confidence. "No." Decisive, oblivious to the clock as it ticks far past eight and signals the beginning of the end. "We'll have other days."

In a state of undress, Dream smiles, taking swathes of alabaster skin and touching them with gentle curiosity, like he wants to see more than he already can, touch until George's body is only second to his.

Eyelashes flutter, honeysuckle vines twist and force them back together, different now. It seems as though everyone but George will be heedless to how they sit in early morning light. How they fit together so perfectly that it should be berated.

Maybe that's not a bad thing. George has always liked the danger of private affairs.

Dream's fingers are at the nape of his neck, comfort in waves as he presses in circles and pulls away knots. If it weren't for the fact he definitely shouldn't be here, George would have already let himself be lulled back to drowsiness and sleep.

Astonishingly, he still has some morals. "So that shower?"

"Here?" Dream asks—a definite question but not judgement. "Do you want me to smuggle you into the bathroom?"

"Yes."

The raise of an eyebrow, the tugging up of pink lips as a smile turns to a smirk. Dream knows that George wants to stay. He bleeds red like any other man and holds him with a grip loose enough to spark embers from matchsticks against red skin.

It shouldn't hurt when Dream lets go, for some reason it does.

George watches him waddle to the door, a sheet wrapped around his waist and strips of bare skin on clear display.

"C'mon," Dream says. "Coast is clear."

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Like all good things, their meeting comes to an end.

Subtlety has never been Dream's strong suit, George could tell from the very beginning. In response, Dream just wanted to prove his point. Hickeys and red and opened mouth kisses that set George's self ablaze. He sees them in the shower, in the mirror, when Dream's up behind him

asking to wash his hair and keep their bodies close.

And pulling on Dream's clothes—fresh clothes—manages to dull the ache in his chest just a little bit more. Because at least then he knows that even if he doesn't get to spend another night, he'll still have a part of Dream to hold onto—a beacon to guide the other back into his arms.

The bed is far less comfortable when George is just using it to sit on to pull up his socks.

Dream is by his desk, twirling on his chair and shaking his head like he's not splashing water all over the room. Yes, it's annoying, but George isn't uptight enough to care.

"Call me when you get home," he mumbles against George's head when he's trying to pull his hood up.

He touches his waist like he's a man close to death, in the presence of divinity with nothing to do other than worship—tip-toe across a tightrope like he'll fall if he touches and crash if he doesn't. George lets it all happen though, even if it makes him frown, because outside of that door there's quiet and then there's road. Nothing bad can happen to them out there.

"Fine," he mutters, even if he knows that calling will be the first thing he'll do.

Watercolour hands reach towards the door, lithe frame stepping away from Dream to finally sneak out of the house. And by now it's late, nearing midday, so finding the right floorboards and steps won't be hindered by the falling sun. He opens the door and takes a step out, checking for nothing then letting it click shut behind him, like he's afraid of solemn beams and stretching hallways.

This is George, in Dream's hallway, in Dream's clothes, completely alone and completely vulnerable, with nothing but stolen charm to his name.

And then the whole world comes crashing down.

"George?"

There are moments in life that cannot be prevented. Inevitably, the earth will be drowned by the rising tides. Inexplicably, fire will burn through forests like they're nothing more than a mere placeholder. No matter what happens, the groundwork has been laid down, pieced together and set in stone so nothing can be reversed.

When Dream comes from a whole new world, returning to a walk of shame in the planes of an old corridor—one that's lined with family memories and a dozen doors—manages to knock George from reality almost instantly.

At first, he can imagine that he made up the voice. It's possible that it was simply his own mind playing tricks on him, but after stunned silence rings for a few more seconds, it's obvious that this is real. That he isn't alone.

George can hardly blame himself for forgetting how to breathe.

Fuck.

Blood pumps faster. This might just be the last time he stands here, alive, with so much wrong in his present and in his past, glowing loud enough for the evidence to be incomparable. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide—George is an awful person and he doesn't even have Dream there to back him up.

Though, the fact that he can even think of Dream right now is jarring. It seems that even in captivity, after he's committed the deed and can only feel the sinking in his chest where his lungs expand too far then press against his diaphragm like they want to break it, George can't do anything right.

Dread. Fear.

It's not a test anymore, nobody is in the clouds egging it on so he's always bound to fail. Now, George has made the mistake and he just has to watch as his "best friend" stares at the evidence, pretending that this isn't his greatest fear finally coming true.

He can feel himself smile before he's able to control his own actions. Something small, his mouth twitching upwards in one uneasy action. Awkward. Tense.

"George," Sapnap repeats, confused, wide-eyed, still. "What are you doing here?"

An eyebrow arches in disbelief. If it's possible, the earth gets dimmer.

Red blooms in angry swatches across Sapnap's expression, each disgusting revelation coming together to shake away the notion that George was ever good enough to trust. It's not screaming, or yelling or anything that indicates reciprocity in the betrayal that he feels. Instead, Sapnap stands carefully, like even coming close to the other will burn his temper away.

Unbearable is the feeling that wracks through George's frame. His mouth is dry.

"Sapnap."

It's an awful feeling, to know that this is real, not just a sick nightmare that George's brain has come up with to trick him into feeling bad. He doesn't quite know what to say. On the other side, it seems that Sapnap doesn't have the same problem.

"Fuck," he laughs, bitter. "I—uh, heard someone leave the bathroom, figured it was free. I wasn't expecting to see you here."

"Yeah." George's throat is closing up. "Hi."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Sapnap asks, almost cutting him off as a shaking head drops low like he's trying to figure this all out in real time. A glance to the closed door and a glance back. "Fucking hell."

This pain is excruciating—like a crimson cut opening up. It was stitched by shaking hands when the wound was still fresh, and now it's being torn back open, like it never really had the chance to heal. George remembers all of his lies and tastes metal on his tongue. Just this time, he held the blade and caused his own demise.

"My brother." Slowly, like he needs to wrap his head around the thought. Gradually, like he really can't believe the sight. "That's low, even for you."

George knows that it's just heightened emotion making Sapnap bite but that doesn't make it any less painful to hear—especially not when it's so horrifically deserved. Does he apologise? Say he didn't do anything that can't be fixed? Even if he does, it might be too late. He can tell that Sapnap notices the colour in his cheeks.

Tension rises high. Flurried thoughts move so quickly that George is left stunned, with his heart beating out of his chest and blood pumping so quickly it'll cause him to collapse.

There's no chance that Sapnap doesn't know that the clothes he's wearing belong to someone else.

Waiting is painful. Starting a sentence feels like holding a gun to his own head. Daggers, bullets, they all pierce skin the same.

"Sapnap," George mumbles, his mind is too quick to compete with. His thoughts are moving so fast.

But no matter how much pleading he does, it'll never be enough.

"You know, I'm not stupid. I had an idea," Sapnap declares, voice rising that much higher. "But I didn't *actually* think you'd do this to me."

This feeling is under his skin, crawling under his bones to tear away his flesh from the inside and make him regret. There's no turning back now, he's been fucked over by circumstance and it's too late to say he feels bad.

George doesn't even know when the door opened, or when Dream found his place behind him. All he knows is that this is spiralling out of control and the cocksure stance that the tallest holds, definitely doesn't help.

"Let us explain."

A honeyed tone has never felt so sour. In the wild, this would be enough for the other animals to run from the water pool. Two packs stand on offence and square off against each other—Dream's with aggression, Sapnap's with defensiveness—both are just as terrifying.

"*Us*," Sapnap spits, mocking. "Oh it's *us* now?"

A laugh rips through the air, bubbly and light, but George can hear the edge that it holds. "Yeah, kind of."

Normally, Dream is nice. Ten minutes ago, he was perfect. Now, as he leads the three of them out of a hallway and into the kitchen, letting them spread out so Sapnap can take his distance and George is stuck disgraced in the middle, he's a different person. Like this room gets to see a new side of him. Or at least a side that's new to George.

"You're unbelievable," Sapnap spits, heavy footsteps crashing to the ground like there's so much he wants to ask but he doesn't know how to phrase any of it. "Do you have nothing to say for yourself?"

Tension. The room is too small for the three of them.

A pale jaw trembles under watchful eyes. Sapnap should be angrier. The fact that he isn't yelling makes it so much worse.

"Stop looking at him like you've got a stick up your ass," Dream scoffs, shrugging as he mills around their kitchen like this is any other day and he's just come to get himself a drink. The glass gets lifted, the water gets poured. George is too shocked to find it attractive. "It's not a big deal. We're fucking, so what? You don't mind, do you Sap?"

Dull, stinging pain rings behind George's eyes. He's losing his best friend. "Dream stop it."

"C'mon Georgie," he mutters in response, the same tone he uses in bed, the one where he convinces George that lying isn't the worst thing in the world without using as many words. "He's

already caught us now.”

“Dream.” George’s voice is sharp. “Can you just go for a minute?”

“Yeah Dream, leave,” Sapnap echoes.

The shrugging of shoulders. Being nonchalant isn’t a redeeming quality, but Dream knows when enough is enough, when it’s time for him to leave. So with a glass in hand, and a last, fleeting touch to George’s waist then another glance to Sapnap, (far more pointed), Dream leaves, although neither will ever truly know how far he goes.

George can hear his own heartbeat in his ears. Anger, frustration. He can only imagine how the other is feeling.

“I asked you not to,” Sapnap whispers. This is where it starts, where George is well and truly fucked. “I said family was off the table.”

Silence feels thunderous.

“I know.”

“So, not only did you sleep with him, but you hid it from me.”

Accusing. Sapnap knows what happened and only wants to hear it being said by a misleading cherry tongue, not for sick enjoyment but for final closure.

George wants to shrivel up and disappear. Pink is grey, and yellow is grey, and moonlight isn’t an option anymore so he just has to stand with the large, overhead bulb as it drowns him in it’s unforgiving colour, two lips pressing together in dryness and in red. His lips are cracked.

“You didn’t give me any other option.”

“Yes I did,” Sapnap says immediately. “To not fuck my brother.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“You didn’t mean to? How did you not *mean* to?”

“I didn’t expect to catch feelings,” George rushes. He feels eyes boring into his skull, tearing him apart like no answer will ever be enough. “It’s not like I planned this?”

“I specifically asked you not to,” Sapnap breaks, frustration in the tips of his tone. “I trusted you and you didn’t even have the guts to tell me you couldn’t stay away. I had to catch you sneaking out of his room, were you ever planning on letting me know?”

“I knew you wouldn’t like it.”

“But you did it anyway.”

Guilt crashes like the tide against jagged cliffs, like tears trying to force their way out from behind closed eyes.

There’s nothing that’ll make him sound good, but he can’t admit that he was in the wrong now he’s already committed the crime—he likes Dream. *God*, he is allowed to like Dream.

Anger bubbles under paling skin.

This isn't just a fling. *Sapnap* of all people, does not get to dictate how it ends.

This time, the bite in George's tone is obvious. Absurd, that *Sapnap* seriously expected him to abide by his every wish. He thinks that if the sky was falling and the choice of freedom or death was offered then he'd always choose death, because for some reason, *Sapnap* doesn't understand that people can have their own free will. Neither *Dream* nor *George* is his property to own.

"It's my life."

"And it's my family."

"Then, shouldn't you be having this conversation with *Dream* too?" *George* asks. He refuses to be burnt at the stake for a pattern that he didn't sew alone. This sounds far more like a family problem than anything to do with him, even if he does sit burning at the heart. "I'm not just to blame."

Tutting. "He wouldn't listen."

He can almost hear *Dream*'s laugh. The little, "I wouldn't," that he'd give if he was even in the room.

The more rational part of him is screaming to apologise, although that's easier said than done, because right now, how is he meant to apologise when he's being yelled at like it's his only option left? Stubbornness. An affinity for danger is so much more fun when he's been willing it along, now that he's been thrown into the deep end, left to drown while his best friend's disappointed eyes bore into his skull, it's far less enticing.

"*Dream* doesn't give a shit about anyone but himself." *Sapnap* starts. It's like he isn't even talking to *George*, like he just wants to get this off of his chest. "He doesn't care about me, or you, or anything unless he's getting something he wants."

Against his best wishes, defensive words are spat like acid. "Don't talk about him like that."

Seeing *Sapnap*'s fall is like watching everything crumble.

It's not right to be here like this, *Sapnap* barely looks awake, evidently this is not how he wanted to start his day. Now, *George* will have the vision of his best friend losing faith, everything being fucking ruined by his own disgusting nature.

He's not a good person, self admittance doesn't make that any better, but fuck, *George* just wants this to be over. He never wants to be looked at like he's a stain, nothing more than a nuisance who's taking up everybody's time and pretending they're valued even though that value is faltering.

There's no sparkle in *Sapnap*'s eyes, nothing to tell *George* that he's doing fine and the day will end with them back on the couch watching movies and going to stupid arcades like idiots because that's what friends do best. Quite simply, *Sapnap* looks at *George* as though this should be the last time he's ever forced to face that expression. Behind those eyes, *George* can see something shatter, something red, something unfixable.

Maybe he's never been the most in touch with his feelings, will never be the most sickly romantic guy out there, but he isn't dumb enough to ignore the signs that *Sapnap* is distancing himself, stepping back with pulling eyebrows and loudness in a singular expression.

Disappointment. The worst feeling of them all.

"God, you are—you are so *selfish* *George*," *Sapnap* exclaims. He shouldn't be breaking, not at the

feet of a man that's never been good enough to care. "You're so fucking selfish that you couldn't do the one thing I asked you too, you couldn't listen to me for one minute."

"You're being ridiculous," George pretends—that's easier than admitting it, after all.

"You really are dumb, aren't you?" Sapnap accuses, but George has never been dumb, he's just been ignorant. "Friends don't betray each other like this"

Anger is in the walls he puts up. Right now he could talk with grace, express the things he wants to without dragging Sapnap down to fiery pits and the ugliest of emotions, but he can't. He can't deal with being told what to do and how to act, who he's allowed to talk to—even if he knows his wishful thinking crosses all the boundaries that the other set up from the very beginning.

"Friends don't police who the other can and can't date."

"So, you guys are *dating*?"

Clearly, that wasn't the right thing to say.

"Yes."

Feelings keep George numb. He half-wishes that he could chalk this up to some far-fetched dream that will never be rooted in reality, not something that's intrinsically linked with his inability to let anyone be happy. He has no right to be angry, at the same time, it's a part of every right he has.

Sickness makes Sapnap's expression shift, his everything being split in two, like he's flickering between the pain he holds in anger, and the torch he holds to tell him he's been George's friend longer than he has enemy.

Quiet, hushed, Sapnap is holding his breath. His words cut the corners of his lips, hurting him so much to say—in George's unknowing opinion.

"You're going to get hurt."

That's rich.

"What do you mean?" George asks.

These are the gates to hell swinging closed in bubbling blue frustration. It seems that George has even been exiled from here.

"You don't actually believe that he likes you." Sapnap laughs, noting George's twisted expression. "Oh. You do."

Two figures stand with crossed arms and strong minds. (George's is significantly weaker but no one needs to know that except him.) There's nothing worse than friendships that end up like this, because vulnerability may never have been his strong suit but Sapnap definitely knows a few things about George that he'd hate to be used against him.

They sharpen words because they're their only blades. Sapnap could throw a punch but George would never throw one back, he's already done too much, perhaps he'd deserve some sense being knocked into him anyway. That could be the only way he'll ever truly learn.

But it doesn't need to get that far because after disappointment there's spite. Spite disguised as care, like Sapnap still wants to pretend that he's always had George's best wishes in mind, as



though this isn't him knowing the other's deepest insecurities and playing them out just to watch him squirm.

Sapnap has known Dream for far longer than George, after all—it'd only be right for his character to be analysed by the man he lives with instead of the one he beds.

"It's never crossed your mind that he could be fucking someone else?" A shrug, simple, nonchalant. "Old habits die hard."

But that's too far. That's not a petty accusation, that's Sapnap being a dick and thinking he's perfectly in the right to spew slander only because George didn't tell him absolutely everything about himself, like he has a right to know.

It's sour and ugly, and coming from Sapnap's mouth, bleeding quiet hostility.

As he stands in a singular room, George feels his own legs threaten to give in. He swore he wouldn't get this emotional, that he wouldn't get hurt by petty words that have no truth to them. George knows Dream, he *knows* that Dream likes him, there's been plenty mornings and plenty words that have reassured him of that when he's been dumb enough to question it himself.

They're for each other and each other only. The fact that Sapnap would even say something so crude is egregious. It's almost like he wants to ruin something he knows nothing about for his own personal gain—though George doesn't particularly know what there is to gain, other than two ruined bonds.

"He likes me," George mutters. That's a fact, he shouldn't be questioning it, there's nothing to question. "We talk."

A scoff. Sapnap is harsh under blinding light.

"Right?" He laughs, spoken as though he knows something that George never will. "He's not with you just because it'd piss me off."

Confusion. Grey. Mottled purple and caramelised gasps.

The constellations aren't allowed to die but they do. George stands with his flame starting to fade.

"What?"

Of course, he wishes that Sapnap has no idea what he's talking about, but he seems far too sure to be lying—acting as though he's never spoken a word that doesn't echo the truth.

Along the way, George lost his best friend to rage. He would say it makes him hard to recognise, but when he created the monster, pretending he can't see his own work would be a sin in of itself.

"You're telling me he's never been reckless? Almost got you guys caught? Because the Dream I know, the one that's never had a steady relationship and is a complete asshole to everyone he meets, would love to see me react to my best friend leaving for him." Sapnap is all-but smiling, like breaking this news is the only joy he'll ever get, especially now that he's discovered the secrets he desperately wishes he was entitled to. "He only cares about himself."

The look in his eyes says mischief. George knows it well enough to bite back. "That's not true."

"Listen to me," Sapnap pleads, almost genuine enough for George to do so (even with something twisting dark at the dip of his chest and making his breathing heavy). He can't take this right now,

the passive aggressive arguments that are leading him in loops. They feel too godly, like it's just up to them to escape fate. "He's only fucking you because he thinks it'll hurt me. He was probably making fun of you at the start. Laughed at you with his friends and then got off with someone else in the library."

"Stop it."

"I'm telling the truth. Dream doesn't *date*."

There were days where Sapnap was the only thing that George ever knew. He was attached, hopelessly. That's not what he is with Dream. With Dream, he doesn't not need to be berated like he's a child, talked to like he won't understand the words unless they're uttered with sickly sweet saccharine in the tone.

As much as he wants to, George will never understand Sapnap. They can be "best friends" and trust each other more than the world itself can ever know, but George will never want Sapnap the way he does Dream. They're good as friends, awful in arguments—it's ludicrous to even think about.

Though maybe the words hold some truth.

Dream is Dream after all, and George is George. Other than for ego, Sapnap has no reason to lie about his own brother. Especially when his brother is known for his charm and George quite simply isn't. He's never exactly been cool.

Desperation still clutches to the things that he has though. No one cares enough to see wavering blue lines wrapping like coils around his limbs and keeping George stuck in place while he drowns in clothes that smell too much like Dream. In the now, attempting to feel safe.

Bitter, are his next words. Undeserved, is his blank stare. Cold, cold umber eyes that will never fully grasp the concept of maturity.

"Is this you being jealous or something?"

For a moment, Sapnap stops functioning. "Jealous?" He barks. "Can you hear yourself?"

In all honesty, George can't. His head is ringing too loud for him to understand what's going on around him.

Dream's feelings could always just be fake.

This is a touch that burns. This is something eating him from the inside out, letting George pretend that he's always been hollow and that this isn't some sick form of masochism.

There isn't a point where he knows when to stop, when Sapnap smiles and tells him that it's all okay, because it simply isn't. In Sapnap's place there's someone who's long gone, who's only been sticking around because that's what they thought would work.

It's a shame that George couldn't see it sooner—how nobody really likes the person who makes every problem their own.

He sees a step back and a step forward, Sapnap getting close enough that George is momentarily afraid he might swing before that shifting turns to pacing and that pacing turns into panic. The stress is yellow, ugly, cold yellow, the yellow that doesn't mix with red, the one that's closer to green than comfort and manages to make even ice feel warm under a gentle touch.

Maybe George is spiralling too. Maybe this isn't going to be his finest of moments. Either way, the seed has been planted and now he's recounting his every step, how Dream kissed him to sleep and if his mind was really on George that whole time.

Can it really be jealousy if Sapnap has no qualms with breaking George's heart so easily?

It's too much to process, too much to want to process. Purple means confusion in a way that isn't black and white, because grey is the blank slate and George hates the thought that Sapnap isn't as readable as he used to be. He's far more complex when he doesn't want to show the things he could, when he's angry, and odd, and all the things that George has never known him to be.

Sapnap's voice is low. If he wasn't stuck in his own stupid mind, then he'd be scared of the intention it holds.

"I mean when I first told him I liked you, he was almost supportive—other than a few comments about how he could *totally* fuck you first," Sapnap laughs, though it doesn't sound like he's kidding, it doesn't sound like this is something he finds funny in the slightest. "I can't believe I was dumb enough to think he was joking."

No longer a question. Confusion in a sure-fire statement. "So you *are* jealous."

This time, he doesn't get an answer.

In order to enter at the worst of times, Dream must have had one ear pressed to the door, his neck craned around just so he knows to waltz in while a staring match ensues. Iced glares are layered with earth—dark tones burning holes into skin until the whole room is rolled in smoke and all things maddened.

It doesn't help that Dream doesn't mind his own space. As he walks, he grins, acting oblivious to the rising tension by dropping down an empty glass so it shakes and wobbles and makes far too much noise for a quiet room.

"There he is," Sapnap groans. "Did you enjoy your drink?"

"It was lovely," Dream jeers. "Did you enjoy harassing my boyfriend?"

Doused in unease and coated in malice, George is snappy. "Dream, don't start."

Dream doesn't know the things he's capable of. "What?"

Ice used to thaw. In the summers, in the heat, the cold grows weak and melts, burning down walls because the fire that was held so close used to help.

Now, ice evaporates. It freezes again, disappears in other places, and George is left cold, alone and without a single wall because the warmth has spun out of control and is so intent on ruining everything in its path.

To think he was worthy of happiness was so ridiculous. George is an awful, awful person. He doesn't deserve love and he doesn't know what he was expecting because this was so obviously going to happen. Dream was always going to be too much for him, Dream was always going to want someone more, who has more experience and could feel empathy in a way that George has been teaching himself to throughout little mistakes.

But it's not just that George isn't worthy of joy, it's that no one in his life thinks it either.

He looks to Sapnap and sees a guy that let him be used, one that knew exactly what was going on and now it's all finally blowing up, he's been wronged too many times to even care that George can barely see through the tears welling up in his eyes.

He looks to Dream and doesn't know what to feel.

The taunt of a falling tone is biting. "You can see it now, can't you?"

George has never hated Sapnap more than in that moment.

It's like he gets some sick enjoyment from George's despair, like muttering black laced words doesn't hurt him as much as it should. So much for "best friends" George muses.

"Go on, ask," sharpness says. "I'd love to hear how faithful mister perfect has been."

It's like a dagger has been dropped, sinking into deep waters with ripples of blue fleeing from the scene, jolting.

"Fuck you," Dream spits, angry, pointed, speaking as though he's gotten so sick of this routine and is finally brave enough to let it show. "You don't know shit, stop talking like you do."

But that might not be true. According to Sapnap, there's way more secrecy behind Dream's actions.

It's why the room keeps spinning, why the fog and clouded mind is finally wearing off, because George had been under a spell from which he didn't want to be set free, even if that's the only way for him to ever see true intention.

But there's malice in every harsh word, no way for him to tell if carmine is being thrown into the air simply because that's what's best for them all, or because it's the only option left.

Nerves. Regret. Anger.

After a while, each feeling starts to look the same

Still, George keeps his voice level, refuses to let his shoulders shake. He'll be damned before either of these men see him cry. "So you aren't using me?" He asks, sincere. Perhaps George doesn't know as much as he once thought. Maybe he's not the only one with secrets. "You didn't just flirt with me and make me fall for you because you wanted to see how Sapnap would react."

If George were able to force himself to forget a single thing in life, he'd surely choose to forget the way Dream's entire body stiffened in that moment. How he stuttered and stopped and turned towards George with nothing but indistinct blue fret on angled features. Surely, that's not admittance, even though it feels too clear to ignore.

"George—"

Sapnap cuts him off before he can form a full sentence. "Told you."

"Stop," Dream says, still tense, but George can't dissect it right now.

It's too many torches to hold, too many conversations to balance, the only thing left to do is step back and hope it'll fall back into place after pondering.

"Just go, Dream," George requests. He's never this rational, it's just fear that means he can't listen—won't, rather. "We can talk after."

Dream doesn't do everything perfectly—he never will, George isn't too sure he even has the capability to fix every single thing he's ever done—but watching ivory teeth snag on a lower lip, anxiousness pointing towards guilt as Dream shifts from foot to foot, is far worse than if what Sapnap said is true.

George prays to god that it isn't.

"Don't blame him," Dream asks on his way out, posture fixed away from George just so he knows that at least one thing isn't meant for him.

This is not how things were meant to go. This is not how anything was ever meant to go.

A grey storm looms heavy over slender shoulders, weighing him down like he's meant to break.

Sapnap scowls. "Don't tell me what to do."

George's eyes can't help but follow Dream as he leaves the room once more, throwing him a small smile that only wants to soothe but ends up shooting blue chills down his spine.

It's safe to say his eyes linger for too long, upset brimming behind umber irises, and Sapnap must see it because he scowls and shakes his head, letting disgust show in huffing tones.

"You can't seriously be taking his side?" He asks. Like that's ludicrous, like he hasn't been trying to make George break ever since he saw him in someone else's clothes, standing in a hallway head to toe from the remnants of bitten lips. "All I have *ever* wanted is for you to be happy, but as soon as I ask for that not to fuck up my family, it's too much. Does our friendship really mean that little to you?"

"Of course our friendship means something." George is scornful, distressed. There's a possibility that he hasn't been good to the other but that does not lay the groundwork to question his morality, or at least he doesn't think it should. Blue, pale, pale blue, not calming in the slightest, only portraying despair. George moves forward, only being narrowly missed by the other as he's avoided. "I care about Dream but I care about you too, Sapnap. It doesn't have to be one or the other."

"But you can't love me in the way I want you to."

George stills. He looks up at Sapnap and is met by eyes that sit glazed over, a stance that turns in on itself.

At first the words don't make sense—they twist and they turn and they attempt to dig under milk skin just sitting there to cause little bumps. In silence, George pretends not to notice how the room is getting smaller. If he were to knock a pin to the ground it'd surely cause noise louder than this room has ever heard. A staring match with no winners; moulding green mixed with cherried red.

And then the words finally click. Unfathomable, they settle in George's mind (smarting, burning, miserable), his expression mirroring his muddled brain.

*Fuck.*

This cannot be happening.

But it is.

"I'm in love with you George."

Sapnap says it like he's ashamed, like he never wanted to speak these words out loud because they're loaded enough to shoot bullets through his own skull and keep him in check.

"Not in the friend way. In the way means that every time I look at your stupid face, it kills me to know you'll never feel the same."

George almost wishes Sapnap could be strong enough to never say it.

"I didn't know," he says, but when he looks back there's no telling if that's actually true.

"Well now you do." A voice breaks far too easily, wrapping with raspberry and falling with droplets onto the oncoming storm. "So you can also know that Dream just likes flirting with the people I like and having sex in every room of this house because it I don't like it."

George knows that Sapnap is angry, but that doesn't mean he has to lie like this.

"But you were happy for me?"

"Because *you* were happy," he explains, stressing each syllable as though it makes a difference. "I didn't want to ruin your day by telling you something you wouldn't want to hear. But now that I know it's Dream who's leading you on, I couldn't exactly keep quiet."

Swatches of green are frozen in George's vision, despicably placed and flashing in blackened sparks. The moment before it gets too much lasts forever—he can envision the breaking moment, see his own demise as it starts to bite—and George knows exactly where it went wrong, because that's when frustration settles into resentment.

One note, flat. "He's not leading me on."

"He is," Sapnap chuckles. "You don't know him like I do."

"And you don't understand our relationship either."

Sapnap stiffens, nose scrunching up with the rest of his expression. Like this, it's cold, tough like metal and consuming like shadowed debt. George sees him start to cease.

"Whatever," Sapnap mumbles. They're nowhere near done, not even close, but this seems to be as far as they'll ever get.. "I'm going."

"Where to?"

Shrugging. So many questions unanswered.

It's as though Sapnap can't even look at him, because when he does, he glances away with too much haste. Umber eyes flicker over that sullen expression, blinded by their own anger enough to make the world shake. This way, they're both angry, both so horrifically on edge.

"I don't know, just, don't try and call, I don't want to see you in my house again."

There's a part of George that wishes it were just a joke, unfortunately he's far too good at reading bright red signals to even mistake it for that.

The door slams shut before George can even process the sound of tapping footsteps. Once again, he's by himself, except this time he doesn't feel it.

Each time George steps foot in this hallway it seems to get longer.

Now, he searches for answer. Now, his hands shake and skin melts as he reaches for the door handle and pushes straight into someone else's space.

Dream sits by his desk, grinning up at George then cowering when his snarl is not reciprocated.

"Is it true?" George asks. No build up—Dream knows what's being asked of him.

Dishonesty. "Is what true?"

*"Dream."*

The sight of black snake bites disappearing into the other's mouth doesn't ripple with pink. Instead, it showcases nerves, something that George didn't think Dream could have. He watches a smile flicker, a sad smile waver and crease like it shouldn't be so prominent on bitten lips.

The doorway is being closed, George stepping into the room like it's going to stop him from tripping into a whole new dimension.

Aventurine eyes clash with the darkest brown. If they look at each other long enough then maybe things will be different, they could be transported into a whole new world where there's no one except themselves to worry about.

"I don't want to tell you," Dream finally says, like this is how it has to be. "You'll hate me."

Perhaps this is his own fault for throwing caution to one side so quickly. George truly thought that a citrus infused smile would last him eons without a single malfunction.

Dream has proved himself to be sweet and even more tender, and in bed when he was pressing open-mouthed kisses to George's neck the only thing in the other's mind was the possibility that he could have this sort of like forever—the insatiable type, the one he never thought he'd get.

George knows that things can always get better, he knows that arguments are cruel and all ending, but they don't have to be. The one thing he didn't expect was to be thrown to the dirt and torn apart so cruelly before they can even get there. There's no chance that they can last.

He looks to Dream and crosses his arms, sweaty skin, running warm.

"I'm already starting to."

And there's a possibility that Dream follows the same principles. Maybe, he'll take George and paint him in constellations, give him a warm hug and say sweet nothings because he knows that that's what the other needs, but of course that's not how this works.

Of course, Dream can't see why there's anything to even be upset about. "Maybe I didn't care as much as I should've at the start," he shrugs, feigned indifference putting cool ice into his tone. It's like he doesn't even want to let George feel heard, like he doesn't care enough to pretend. That's not the Dream George knows though. The Dream that George knows would never want him to be upset. "But I do now, and that's what matters, right?"

Sapnap's words are spinning on the flats of George's mind.

"So you flirted with me just for fun?" He asks monotonously. "How did you think this would end up?"

"I don't know, I didn't know how great you were at the start," Dream barely explains. "But when

we kissed in the rain, I realised how much you could mean to me, how good you were, y'know?"

It's like he truly expected that to be the end of it. Dream spins in his chair and cocks his head to one side, strands of dirty blond hair messing his vision.

George has never been one to let things go. "So when you asked me out on a date, it was just a part of your game?"

Dream is confused—either a good actor or an even bigger idiot than he first thought. Standing in his clothes feels suffocating, his smell is under George's nose, and his warmth is almost too much, especially when a head is light and a body is shaky, scared by the words that are coming out of his own mouth and the thought of what it could mean to be right.

George hates this. He wants his best friend back, better yet, he wants two.

"Is that why you freaked out before we went to bed, when I told you I was a virgin?"

More quiet. George's heartbeat is in his fingertips.

"Yes," Dream sighs. This isn't an apology, it's an excuse, anyone could see that from a mile off. It's the exact words that make George feel hollow inside, like his chest wants to cave in and force him out of his own body, grave. "But just because it felt so important, I didn't want your first time to be in the dark, with no candles or music or anything to make it special. I wanted it to be good for you."

Back to the car. Back to Dream kissing George with passion that couldn't be faked, then cut to him doing the same thing to a thousand others. How well does George know Dream, actually?

"So was this your big secret?"

Dream doesn't seem to understand. "What?"

This is a flurry of ash—it's purple and all things putrid. It's confusing and makes George want to sob. He can't tell if he's going too far, or if it's not far enough, but what he does know is that Dream's furrowing eyebrows and reddening cheeks aren't helping the situation.

He needs to think before he speaks.

George is making a habit of the awful tendency to overthink and give his own flaws to other people, because maybe he's shitty enough to stab everyone in the back if it's for personal gain, but that doesn't mean Dream is too. Unfortunately, there's no proving it.

"That you don't actually like me. You were just leading me on because you wanted to see if you could, and then you realised that spending time with me isn't as hilarious as you thought it'd be. Considering I didn't drop down to my knees like everyone else as soon as you asked."

It's a big assumption, but Sapnap has already tried to make George believe it, and admittedly, asking is the last thing he has left. Maybe he was being used. Maybe he'll never find someone who he can like and be liked back from in earnest—perhaps that's too much of a stretch.

"Was that your secret?"

It's a thousand emotions. Dream looks vulnerable, no matter how many times he attempts to shake away fear, the trembling of calloused hands and the way sharp canines pull apart a pink lower lip is all telling.



It could be because it's true, or because it's not. For his own sake, George hopes it's the latter.

"Of course not," Dream says, there's still no telling how much he means it.

"Or was your secret that you knew Sapnap liked me? And you only took me out so you could brag about it to him later?"

Even if Dream has climbed to a stand, is looming over George like that's something that could make his words that much more convincing, George refuses to back down. The arch of painted hands is smudged, from the inside his own expression feels like failure. Sinking is despair, and weakness comes far too quickly after the intimacy that they've shared.

But this is spiralling and Dream does nothing to help—nothing to make himself seem trustworthy.

"Am I just some toy to the both of you?"

Still no answer. Sometimes, George thinks that he should never have got involved.

In place of meaning, Dream shakes his head, trying to shift the topic like it'll help. "Our family drama isn't your problem."

Their voices are getting louder, bodies shifting away from each other so effortlessly just to put more space between them—as though that will fix the fact that they're descending into chaos. Unorganised anger and scornful sentences. This morning was so good. Everlasting, George can feel Dream's touch still on him, soothing, calm. And there's no saying they can never go back to that because god knows he wants to, but if he never gets a straight answer then how is he supposed to trust the fact that he's wanted?

Despite it all, George can still hear the silence of his own mortality ringing in the background.

"It is when you enjoy using me to piss *him* off."

Dream's expression is tight, wound up and so painfully taught. "That's not how it went."

"Then how many other people have you fucked?" George bites, like there's something to win from asking, like he wants to see Dream admit something that'll only cause the both of them pain.

Perhaps it's some sick form of torture, perhaps George really does ruin everything that he touches, but Dream has not been the honest man that George wishes he deserved so working his way into a screaming match only feels natural.

"While we were together?"

"*Together*," George scoffs bitterly. "Yes."

"None."

This is ruining him, tearing him open. He can't do the arguments, not when they're bound to end with more anger than they started. Why can things never be simple? Why does everyone have to lie?

It's pathetic for such simple words to wipe the vibrancy from George's skin.

It's these little deaths—the ones that make him feel so hollow and lifeless that ruin life for the unforeseen future. This could be falling out of love, more likely, it could just be distress. Either way, George bleeds purple and cracks with yellow, searching for something that will soothe his

rising stress.

"You can't expect me to believe that."

"I'm telling you, none." Dream reiterates. Agitation is red on his face, running from vein to vein while he groans and throws his hands to the sky. "Why don't you trust me?"

Like he doesn't know.

Without Dream, George would have nothing left. He's put too much into this to let it go so easily. He's pumped in pink and tainted himself with muddled reds, let himself become the caricature of the things that he thought he never would.

Refusing to just be one of the many faces that Dream drags to bed comes with unrequited worry and pitiful amber undertones, because as someone strong looks at George, they'll probably never see how a lack of reassurance has suffocated him.

"You do have a history, Dream. And Sapnap hasn't lied yet."

This is a battle that no one is going to win and yet neither seem to back down. George is glistening with bubbling yellow annoyance, like right now out of everything and everyone, the only person to blame is Dream.

Because without Dream, George would still have a best friend. He was led astray by green eyes and attractiveness that'll never be matched, and that's not just his fault, it's the other's for ever letting it get this far.

"Since we got together, I have only wanted you," Dream confesses, slow. "I thought you actually believed me when I said that the sex I've had in the past doesn't change that."

They're both more bold when they're being destructive, burning bridges because it's the easiest thing they'll ever need to do. And maybe in George's head this is Dream being honest, trying to finally tell the truth after months and months of Sapnap policing his love life, but that's only feeble hope. Dream's not being petty or unjust, and there's no way to tell if it's truth, but it's still so, so awful.

Insecurity that makes words sharp and actions so large—the consequence of his own misdemeanour. In red, Dream is still talking. The fact that George couldn't even pay attention is far too telling.

"Fucking listen to me, you dick."

"I'm the dick?" George laughs, bitter, broken, not finding it funny at all but having nothing left to say. He wishes he could get out the words that he means but they're trapped at the back of his throat and making it too difficult to breathe. "That's rich."

Finality means rushed words. Things that neither of them mean but their blood is pumping so fast that that it's the only thing left to say.

Blurriness. Fog.

Somehow, they've begun to shout.

"What?" Dream's rolling his eyes. "It's not like you're completely blameless, you were half using me too. For what? Freedom? You probably wanted to piss Sapnap off too."

“You do not get to take moral high ground here,” George spits. He doesn't want to do this, still he's forcing himself into closer proximity with the other, sudden, not at all intimate, as though he can pretend he's never done anything wrong. “I fucking hate you, Dream.”

It's a lie. Doused in venom, wrapped in poison, George says things he doesn't mean with urgency because it's all he has left. He's always been emotional, but he's been good at hiding it too. Show aggression, be assertive, push everyone away until there's nothing to think about other than the fact that he's alone.

Suffering.

And for a moment there's nothing.

The earth moves in slow circles, never off its axis as it revolves around a burning star. Standing in a house that isn't his own, on a road that he only walks when he's feeling lonely, they're all insignificant, George knows that. But even if he isn't the only man that's ever mattered, little things still sting.

Dream's burning gaze, the one that says he doesn't care how much he likes the other he'll still speak his mind in full—always communicate—pricks holes in the safety of George's bubble. This isn't them, but then again, do they even know what “them” is?

“You're lying to yourself if you say you're saying you didn't know that Sap liked you,” Dream mutters.

This time it's citing. Disappointment again. George has learnt that he hates disappointing people.

“I didn't.”

"Sure."

"I *didn't*."

"You're not as innocent as you think, George. You're not invincible."

And that George knows. Of course he's not invincible, no one is. He's never even claimed to be, but it seems as though Dream thinks he has. It's as though the other thinks that George has no capability of being honest, like he's been gliding through life completely blind to what's around—just hoping that he won't stand on something sharp enough to hurt him.

The words that he can relate to are the ones that make him angry. George will never admit it, if he did then he's sure it'll be his shaking downfall—full of blue sobs and turquoise confessions—but Dream knows him too well. They aren't good, on any terms, but Dream knows him, and for a millisecond, George can appreciate it.

Then it's back to poison and the most malignant words.

“You're not either.”

“But at least I don't pretend to be a saint,” Dream laughs, dryly, and George hates how much he means it.

“Is that really what you think of me?” He asks. The raising of eyebrows is intentional, the way his voice trails off is not.

“I think you're scared that I might actually give a shit about you,” Dream jabs. “So self-destructing and ruining it all like you tried to do with *him* is all you have left.”

Him being Sapnap. George knows this.

“I don't like you.” George spits, juvenile, like a kid on the play field whose only intent is to hurt, rather than understand. “You can say what you want but the truth will just be that you wanted to hurt your own family and didn't care what happened to me in the process. Catching feelings was just a side-thought.”

“So is this it then?” Dream asks, hands in the air. “Are we breaking up?”

It sounds like he's already made up his mind.

Finality is black; it's greyed out stripes and planted imminence, and the iridescence that hangs from Dream's grip is so horrifically intentional that George only feels defeated, only feels merciless.

“Do you want to break up?”

George doesn't. George really, really doesn't.

“You told me to tell you if things got bad and they have,” Dream states. He's not crying (it'd be wrong for George to say he wishes he was), instead he's barely showing a single emotion on his face, an action so forced it hurts. “It's probably best if we don't see each other again.”

“No.” George shakes his head. They didn't sneak around for months just to throw it all away as soon as things get tough. “You do not get to decide that. We talked about this, you do not make the decisions for the both of us.”

Desperation. This could work, they can get through this. Sure, they'll argue now but this can't break them, they can't let it break them.

The backs of George's eyes start to sting. He can feel blue brimming behind the glass, hurting him as he holds it back and refuses to let it show.

Pain is the only thing he knows right now. Pain and how it'll never be enough for Dream. No matter how much George begs, Dream really was just using him to get to someone else.

A sigh. “George, get out.”

At the end of the day, George is still a person. Perhaps he's dramatic at times, threatening when he doesn't need to be, but right now he doesn't have innocence or the chance to pretend he's well, so the last thing he can turn to is fatalism.

Dream might still see him as a worthy lover, rather than a pathetic display of all the things fucked up in this world.

Ultimately, George's mouth will always get the best of him. “So you ruin me and Sapnap and then kick me out as well?”

“We aren't getting anywhere. For now you should leave.”

*Leave.* Leaving sounds like an end. Leaving sounds like Dream doesn't want George around anymore. He's had his fun and now he's over them as a whole.

George stands on shaking legs, lithe frame taken over by a shudder as he thinks about going home in the light, walking back on cold streets like it's a walk of shame that they've never seen before.

Anger makes him delirious. He's so furious that he'll never see straight again, but on the other side of the road, Dream is still. Calm, like he never cared about the other in the first place—it's safe to say that Sapnap was right.

"If I leave, I'm not coming back." George can't breathe. He can't do anything other than crumble. This is his world falling apart, this is Sapnap realising how shitty he is and Dream having enough of a spine to force him out before it becomes too real. (George would argue that it already is.) "We either talk about this now, or we never do. It's your choice."

For whatever reason, Dream's expression scrunches. "Don't do this."

But George doesn't relent.

Bad decisions are terrifying, laced with unease and wrapped up in blue to showcase that fear to anyone who dares to look. Deciding to throw it all away like this is a pin dropping, inevitable, is one of the biggest mistakes that George will ever make.

That, and the fact he allowed himself to be played so well.

Agony is ripping through Dream's tone. He's not pink anymore, more so red. Seeing him stand like this is jarring—he's not smiling, just statuesque, like the ill-judged decisions that turned George into the spineless, pathetic mess that he's always been, have turned Dream into strength itself.

Final words. George remembers the way he was charmed, how Dream makes him feel like the only person on the planet, and there's still that feeling rising low in his chest, but now that's not a good thing.

He'll be the only person to ever hear Dream's cold tone.

"Go, George."

Scoffing. Self-doubt.

George has to force on a smile. "I really am dumb, aren't I? For some reason, I thought you still cared enough to want me around."

Then there's a twist of malice.

Dream's presence keeps George on edge, even like this, terrifying, angry, he's attractive. And that could be George's fatal flaw, his inability to see the bad for what it is, bad, because he's never going to learn his lesson. He's going to run after Sapnap then beg for Dream to take his place on the edge of a bed once again, just so things will never change despite the fact that change was once the only thing he ever wanted.

Rounded snake bites glint in falling light. George hates the idea that Dream's smile isn't as genuine as he once thought it was, even if he's covered in bruises and purpling brands that should suggest he has commitment.

Doors are closing. Gates are slamming shut, and George, George is being forced out of those spaces by someone whose only intent is to hurt him.

"Go find Sapnap," Dream mocks, lips twisting into a smile that's too forced to be real. It's almost

like he's going out of his way to show George the side of him that's never been exposed, the one that lives off dirt and bitterness and probably once thrived off of George's want. It's a last ditch attempt to make George go, and unfortunately, it works. "And don't come back, I might have someone 'round."

Silence.

In the grand scheme of things, George truly is nothing.

"Fuck you, Dream," he chokes, voice getting trapped in the back of his throat and the top of his chest. Everything heavy.

The waterworks won't come, a bottom lip just trembles, and if George was dumb enough to look past the words, he might be able to trick himself into seeing regret on angled features.

But that would be nonsense. After everything that George has done, it's clear he's no longer wanted.

Not Sapnap, even if he once did. And not Dream, he'll always have better options, because even if he's awful he's on the most part transparent—that's more than George can ever claim to be.

Never again. Never again will George trust a guy like that to take his heart. They're the worst kind of guys, the ones that only know how to use people. The ones that have no care for how their actions come across.

George hates the sight of him, even if this is a monster of his own creation.

Floorboards creak and George is flying to the door, pretending not to notice the way Dream comes after him, checking up that final time when the door is slammed in his face and George is thrown back to the world, broken, sniffing because he refuses to cry.

And maybe he only says it to wooden doors and an uneven pavement as he attempts to stumble home. But the world knows who the words were intended for. A golden boy that George has fallen for and been crushed by in a matter of mere seconds.

Heartbreak shouldn't feel like a fatal wound from which he'll never recover. Blood, too much blood, and shaking hands that stab himself over and over until the red is all he knows.

Cowardice. George is a liar first, a human second.

"Fuck you."

---

George remembers the first few months with Sapnap.

He remembers all the weekends before Dream, the ones where they thought that pretending they would be best friends forever would be enough to make it real.

Wanting to need Sapnap in the way he needs Dream is destructive, George can only ever pretend that he's been a good friend, let alone a good boyfriend, because he's full of flaws—none of them redeemable. Although, if he tried, really, actually tried, he could have been a better person. A little less of a mess.

Suffering the consequences of his own dire actions doesn't feel as fun as the chase. The danger and the thrill was fun. This, this is the fallout as it tackles him down and cuffs him with nothing to do other than stare.

George is in his own room, alone, and for what feels like the first time in forever, he has no one left to turn to.

At first it's anger, then it's frustration, and then it sinks down into something even more despicable. A feeling that keeps George rooted in his own house despite the fact that his parents are poking into his business and asking why he's never out anymore.

Hickeys fade in the span of a singular week, the ones that George presses down on in front of his mirror lasting even longer—only a few days. Long days where George can't comprehend if he's glad to see them go or wishing they could last a little longer, maybe if they did, it wouldn't feel as though he's constantly rolling over—turning away from the past and into darkness, abandoned by his own sin.

Reliance on another person is natural. Humans are complicated creatures, no one can blame George for wishing there was someone by his side, whether that's Dream or Sapnap. In different ways of course, but both equally as confusing.

Undeserved, he feels as though he should hate them both. Understandably, he almost does. To be frank, at the current moment he doesn't think he can stand to see the sight of either one. That doesn't mean he doesn't miss them though, that's years of friendship and milliseconds of a relationship that he'll never quite be over—not that he wants to be.

So he sits on his bed and lets the lights stay off. One hand in his hair and another on his knees to cushion his chin when he leans down on the bumps.

The position isn't comfortable but it'll have to do. Sleeping by himself has never been so hard.

Tomorrow, he'll go to class and pretend that everything is fine, like he hasn't taken the last week off just to wallow in self pity and all things destructive. He might see Sapnap and he might see Dream, in all honesty, he doesn't know if they want to see him either.

He wouldn't be surprised if they've already erased his being from their memory.

But nevertheless, in the distance there's Dream, and constantly behind him, in solitude, there is George.

There was a time where being a bad person felt like it was the only option left, when danger felt like chugging nectar and pure gold, inevitably ending in flames, but so fun for the time being. The aftermath is messier than he thought though. In the garden of Eden, that forbidden apple was poisoned and George is choking on the bite he took, pretending that there was a snake to coerce him into skewed morality even though he knows that he did this to himself.

He wears Dream's hoodie to sleep and Sapnap's sweatpants to lie around in. It's wrong, George knows it. But as he sends unopened messages to Sapnap and pretends to ignore the ones from the other, he can't help but think that he's just echoing his wrongdoings and acting like it's *healing*. That this is his funny little way of accepting that everyone around him will eventually be able to move on and make new friends while he mopes about things in the past, his "golden days" of vain and recklessness.

"Fuck," George mutters to the wall. Pitiful exhaustion screams about how he's managed to get

used to sleeping with another, not by himself, not without a phone call or a kiss.

It's so easy to pretend that the hole in his heart is only because he hurt his best friend, and not because he met a boy that he likes equally as much—just in the wrong way. Still, George's feelings are real and unexplainable. He's a sucker for the things that hurt.

Balancing two people is easy, as long as they both know the terms on which they stand. George must not have got the memo to declare it. That's the first place from which he went wrong.

There are no words to burn like fire in oak-hickory forests. Nothing that will crash with urgency and feed off the harsh cries of George's own breaths as death takes him as it's child and nurtures his sorrow. The only thing he has left are the apologies that he's stupidly left unspoken. It's nothing that he shouldn't have expected, it's red and it's blue and it's every colour that George has learned to love, but now he's here he can't take it back.

He almost wishes that Dream did come with that warning label.

Now, if only he could learn to breathe without guilt.

## Chapter End Notes

comments/kudos are extremely appreciated !! <3

Hope you guys enjoyed the chapter and ty to [flame](#) for beta-ing and helping me with some plot points :).

This chapter took quite a while to write, i've always known where i want to take this chapter in particular, but actually writing it and executing it in a way I'm proud of took a lot more than anticipated. Still, im really happy to finally be posting this and i hope it was a good read

AND PLEASE THIS WORK SAYS 8/10 CHAPTERS IT'S NOT DISCONTINUED  
STOP ASKING ME I BEG,,,, WRITING 20K CHAPTERS TAKES A WHILE  
SOMETIMES + I HAVE OTHER FICS

Speaking of other fics, one of the reasons that this took so long to come out was because i was writing

[this one](#)

for a fic exchange in december too. it's 40k words of dnf and fully completed, and it's probably one of my favourite things I've ever written so if u need something else to read maybe check this out too! It'd be much appreciated

[My twitter](#) |

LEAVE KUDOS <333



## Chapter 9

### Chapter Summary

For a moment, he doesn't even believe it, chalks it up to some sick, sleep-driven hallucination that's been planted in his head by his own deteriorating brain, but when he pinches his arm, then pinches it again, it's clear that this isn't a dream.

This is real.

***Sapnap:***

*Hey*

*Can we talk?*

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George and Sapnap are simple creatures. That, in the sense, that they've never truly found it in themselves to fight.

Most arguments are petty, they're few sharpened words—insignificant spouts of anger that only linger for half a second before they're deemed meaningless again. And before they know it they're back to their usual routine, stardust falling dull in front of two sets of eyes, amber and comforting and the very thing that holds two strings together.

It's always been that way. Every little spat ending the same when the time comes, so of course George believed that this wouldn't be different. That no matter what, they'd get through anything. They'd manage, always, because to fight would be to let it all go.

Why would either of them want that?

There's a sharp breath stuck in the back of George's throat when he sits in the library during lunch hours, silently rifling through his bag for the few things he packed that'll mean he doesn't have to dip into the cafeteria for food.

His hair feels too long as it wisps around the back of his neck, curling and falling flat in front of his eyes each time he attempts to make a move. And every time it does so, instead of booking a haircut, he just wipes it away, pushing back tawny strands with featherlight fingers.

The library is quiet during lunch. Then again, it's quiet almost all of the time.

The little table at the back has become George's second home. He sits here, behind bookshelves and strewn desks, and allows himself to become familiar with the creak of his own chair when he stands up—the way silver scuff marks leave their engravement on the floor, permanency at its finest.

If he had it his way then he'd be out in the cafeteria, sitting with his 'best friend' and putting the smallest of feuds behind them. But George doesn't have it his way. It'd be idiotic to think he's still

allowed to break bread with the other after everything that's happened.

(Perhaps at the back of his mind he knew it wouldn't last forever, but it's so much harder to watch the people he cares for move on as though he never even mattered, than to admit that to himself.)

At lunch, Dream sits with his friends—the ones that he never introduced George to. And at the same time, Sapnap sits with Karl and Quackity—two people that he'd never bothered to know beyond the surface because he hadn't ever found the need.

In all honesty, he didn't think he'd be grasping at straws and regretting all the things he could have done so early, but here he is. Because even if he knows moping is pathetic, it's all George does.

On the first day, anger is the thing that manifested—red and cruel and burning the veins that keep blood warm. It started with a simple message. The very first call left unanswered as Dream's name flickered bright and yellow on the darkness of an unopened phone.

*Audacity.* The bitter taste of disrespect, sour like citrus on his tongue. Dream shouldn't be allowed to just call him like this. Not in the middle of the afternoon when George has barely had the time to collect himself and force all emotions down, past his throat, to the floor.

And so, by the last day, George feels like death.

Seldom. Quiet. He can feel his own breathing curl as it comes out staggered on pomegranate lips.

Alternatively, death is more empty than he had initially thought. There is no need to fear the inevitable now that he's got it sitting heavy in his chest, stabbing like the only thing his own body knows how to do is reject. Reject the feeling, the emotion, the responsibility.

This is George's fault and he understands that. It doesn't mean he should take that blame alone, though.

A friendship with rules, not difficult, nor often imposed, but with rules nonetheless. And George skated around that fact like he didn't have a clue how to process a simple ask. (Don't date Sapnap's brother, don't lie about it.)

And now, for better or for worse, he's sitting alone in the library, pretending he can't feel his phone buzz in his pocket, with another call from a guy he should have blocked (but can't), and acting as though the silence doesn't run rampant in his own mind.

Today, there's no sneaking between library bookshelves, or stealing smiles behind the shadow of a towering wall. It's George by himself, pretending he doesn't see blond hair every time he closes his eyes, and acting as though the familiarity of his own presence hasn't become stifling.

He's by himself again.

In all honesty, he doesn't know how he's meant to feel.

Just as he's about to throw his head down against the desk, hard enough to force his mind to spin for a single second and halt his thoughts before he's dug himself into a deeper resentment than he's already in, there's a voice from above that's dragging him out.

"Is anyone sitting here?"

It's so sudden it almost makes him jump, and when he finally lifts his gaze to the girl that stands in front of him, an awkward expression on her face, he can't help but feel as though moping in the

public library wasn't his smartest idea.

"No." He takes a second to answer, surprised by how unused his own voice sounds after the chords are finally made to move.

For a moment, she looks at him, she takes in his stature and ignores it anyway. It's not her place to say anything about his position, even if the blue cloud that circles above his head tells more than she needs to know.

"Thanks," the girl says. She takes the chair. It grates the floor underneath with the way she drags it behind her body.

And when she walks the edge of George's gaze follows her feet, silently watching as she stalks back to the table from where she came. It's louder when he opens his ears, though he doesn't know when that started. Because the last time he checked he was the only one sad enough to be sitting in the library during lunch. But her table is loud and there are three people sitting there already, sneaking glances that pierce like bullet wounds when they think that George isn't watching.

Perhaps he's being overdramatic, or simply reading too far into a motion that means nothing, but George's skin, under his clothes, feels wrong, like it wants to burn him out—separate him from its all powerful hold. His throat feels tight and his hands feel clammy and he needs to get out of here before the table behind notices his state. So before he can bring himself to even think, the packet he'd been ever so slowly taking out gets pushed back into his bag, and then that bag is picked up to sit over slender shoulders, rushed, frantic and completely irrational.

Tawny brown hair falls down in a manner that's in no way dignified, in front of brown eyes and furrowed brows, lips pursed so tightly they'll surely bleed upon impact. And George, shaking, awful George, takes his stand before he's in too deep, making his way out of the library doors, like the cafeteria isn't full and the halls aren't packed, like he knows where he's going in any way shape or form.

Maybe they'll have a spot by the bleachers, or an empty classroom with a teacher nice enough to let him use it, but realistically there's no point counting on that. Instead, what George will do, is he'll go hang around in any nook small enough to fit him and he'll read over the books to stop the grades that he's already been letting slip, fall far enough that he can no longer grasp onto their back.

He feels his hands, cold, as he stabilises himself before knocking into somebody, shoulder first. And that's enough to send him crashing back into reality, bleak, crushing reality, because this panic is unreasonable and even he knows it. Wandering around aimlessly because he's been put out of house and home in the form of a consistent lunch table both out on the field and now as it gets colder, in the cafeteria too.

This is groundless and George hates himself for it.

Perhaps hate is too strong. He doesn't *hate* himself, more so hates the guy that everyone was able to leave behind. Though there's a chance that can be equated to bitterness, the undermining feeling that tells him his own decisions are always bound to be wrong. Because Dream was his decision and ultimately he sets the precedent.

*He doesn't care about George, he never did.*

At the moment, it seems like Sapnap never gave a shit about him either.

How he can go on with his life like they never even met is unknown to George. If it was that easy for him then he wouldn't be here in the middle of a hallway avoiding eye contact with every single being that bumps into him. Sometimes, late at night, George thinks he deserves a few answers, someone that's actually willing to talk it through and overlook a few of his worst qualities in the way he thinks he can too.

The bell is loud as it pierces the air.

There's no point in standing around and asking questions when he'll never find a decent response, George knows that. But still, even when he resigns to his next class, feet scraping the ground, scuffed shoes scratching the floor that he walks across, it still sits stagnant at the back of his mind.

Maybe he should just try and ask. There's no harm when he's already eating lunch by himself.

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The next time George sees Sapnap, he's in the middle of pretending that his day hasn't been awful enough already.

Naturally, he woke up late. Blotchy skin and creased lines from his sheets branded onto his face, with a brand new pimple making itself known under his skin, where it raises and glares red from how impatient fingers had picked at it to try and force it away. Of course, his hair feels greasy, matted when he touches it, and even after running the strands under cold water then patting them dry, something just feels *off* about the way they're sitting on his head.

Then, he managed to get toothpaste on his hoodie, staining white on the front so it was practically unusable. And just to make his morning even worse than it already was, he spent five minutes staring at his phone while it rang with yet another call from he-who-won't-be-named, that he had to let go to voicemail, just for his own sanity.

(Maybe George doesn't *delete* the voicemails as they pile up, but he doesn't listen to them, anyway.)

But he gets to school eventually. After chasing down the bus and almost having the strap on his backpack break on him from how heavily it's packed, and so, when he finally gets to his locker, to say that George is pissed off would be a bit of an understatement. He copes though, no matter how annoyed he is, and sooner or later he's gotten through his first class and is on a bit of a roll.

What even is there to be upset about anyway?

Well, to start off with, from his once quiet seat on the floor in front of his locker, George is lucky enough to catch eyes with Karl and Quackity as they make their way to their own slots just diagonal of his. At first, he tries not to stare, to push that grey-blue feeling out the back of his mind for good, but that proves easier said than done, especially when the side-eye he's receiving manages to scorch holes into the collar of a crumpled shirt.

He's uncomfortable, to put it plainly. Sitting alone during these biting lunch hours all while he knows he's being watched is tough enough as it is, but somehow things still manage to get worse. Even if, for a moment he thinks that he may be able to get out of this alive, skating on by the skin of his teeth because surely it won't be *too* bad as long as it stays like this.

The three of them. Quiet.

A smile simmers in the air, nervous as pink lips test blue waters to see where they stand. These discreet motions must be an additive for George, as he raises two brows while Karl's hand reaches for his locker door, Quackity pretending not to look back even though the molten air doesn't shield his expression. They look normal, on the other end of the hallway, on the other end of the world.

George half debates getting up just to try and clear the tension.

But the universe hates him, because of course it does, and these small moments can't last forever. Because they aren't here alone, obviously not, it was only certain that soon enough the hallway would light up with new footsteps (flat as they make their sudden noise) and George would be forced to direct his gaze back to his own lap. Meek, because he has to be. It's the only thing that stops him from thinking about how awful a person he's been convinced to be.

"Hey," he hears Sapnap say. "What are we standing around for?"

Mumbling is slurred, these words so contorted when they leave the others lips.

"Nothing," Quackity says, too quick, too sudden to be normal. And at the back of George's mind he knew that Sapnap would have told them everything—they are his friends at the end of the day—but hearing them act so differently around him, like *they* never hung out, never did dumb sleepovers over at the others house, stings more than he thought it would.

It's enough to make him sit up a little straighter.

That must be his downfall though, because as soon as he does, hands touching the greying floor, the gaze that only skimmed comes to linger, and just when he looks up, the face he knows he shouldn't want to see is staring straight back.

Sapnap looks different. George isn't too sure what it is that brings about that thought, just that it sits quietly in his mind. Maybe it's his hair, maybe just his hat or how it sits, but there's something different about him. Something unfamiliar.

Though there isn't much time to delve into that thought, because all too soon George realises they're staring, and all too quick he's forced to stop and hold his breath like if he takes another then his lungs will simply collapse. The gaze is strong, red rimmed eyes looking through him like he's glass, too fragile to touch and too delicate to push, and the hidden conflict that's stirring in Sapnap's chest is so obvious. He's nervous, George is too.

"We should go." He sees Sapnap's lips move before the words reach crystal ears, painted intent falling into the air as though humanity is crumbling with each brushstroke.

"Are you sure?" Karl asks. He's behind Sap. Close.

They're quiet from a distance, but the other can still hear every syllable.

Curt, Sapnap hums. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"You just seem spacey. Maybe we should wait a minute, we're in no rush, right?"

If Karl raises an eyebrow in his direction, then George chalks it up to coincidence. They should hate him, surely. Why on earth would Karl be looking at him like that?

But three sets of eyes can't be chance, and the dread in his stomach is starting to build, because it's now or never, George thinks, if he doesn't try and speak now then he likely won't find the confidence tomorrow either. Loneliness has to be fixable, his apology (if he means it) must be

worth something.

Dark hair is pushed back by a wavering hand, the fingers dragging out knots and curls as George tries to feel the strength in his own limbs.

Sapnap, turning his back, flicks his gaze to Quackity then Karl, muttering words under his breath that the other's not close enough to make out.

The lockers close, the noise filters out, and George is standing before he can stop himself.

He's stepping towards the others before he can think to hold himself back.

"Sapnap, can we talk?" He asks, voice sharp and grating the back of his throat as he catches attention.

It's so obvious that this was unexpected, that the other is startled by George walking straight towards him, crossing the hall just like that, because his neck jerks and his eyes widen, and before George is really within arms length, Sapnap steps back. He furrows his brows and purses his lips, and acts as though this simple thing is unorthodox in every nauseating sense.

"No."

"But I need to speak with you," George presses.

The hallway is almost empty as he stands in the centre, the others crowded back against their lockers. Maybe that's the way it should be though, surely an audience would only make this whole ordeal worse. So George doesn't let his shoulders drop, he stands tall with no meekness on his expression, asking (begging) for Sapnap to give him this.

To at least pretend that their friendship means *something* to him.

(George knows that he's been a hypocrite; somewhere along the line he stopped trying to pretend he wasn't and tried to move on instead.)

Such a gaze is cold when it settles upon him. "I don't want to talk."

Blunt, short, there's awkwardness from the two who are just standing to the side, but George ignores it. He has to try, that's the only thing he's able to do.

"We need to though," he pushes.

A scoff. "No we don't. I'm perfectly fine never speaking to you again."

If it hurts then George has to push that to the side, stop his voice from breaking and his stomach from churning, because that can't be true. He can't have no-one, he just can't.

"Are you really going to pretend I don't exist?" He asks. (If the answer is on his own lips, already answered and known, then he doesn't acknowledge it. This self destruction isn't pretty. This refusal of the guilt he knows he has to feel is only making everything that much worse. But fuck, if Sapnap doesn't think he has a margin for error too, then he's wrong. He's just not right.)

"I'm not doing this right now, George."

And so the laugh that bubbles from between his lips is so horrifically out of place, incredulous and biting, and *fuck* George wishes he knew how to speak all the things on his mind without getting so choked up like this. "So you want me to just wait around until it's convenient for you?"

He doesn't mean to say it and he doesn't mean for it to sound so accusatory, but he wants to know, of course he does. Still, the only thing he gets is the world crashing down against him once more.

"You went *behind my back* to sleep with my brother, George," Sapnap bites, chewing out every word with a tone so strong that eyes that are wide in disbelief. At the back of his mind, he knew that this was coming so there's no firm reason to feel so shocked when it does, but still, George flinches back at the sharpness. "Why would I want to talk to you?"

Shattering, the glass that falls and leaves its spike on the floors. The pit that opens up and bleeds red toffee fire onto the linoleum stretch. It burns his ankles and tries to pull him away, forces dread into his stomach that does everything in its power to drag George back, let self-preservation finally kick in full force.

He doesn't move though. He takes the words and lets them sink into his skin, allows himself to feel their bite.

"What?"

"You heard me."

A pause. The air is thick and it is cold, and even with hurt inching to the front, George can't bring himself to back down. "Then, because we're friends."

"No," Sapnap corrects. "We *were* friends. Not anymore."

"But—"

"No."

Final. Sharp.

The edges of the word cut little holes into the protection that George has been holding up—the hope that they've been *them*, George and Sapnap, inseparable since they met, long enough for a stupid thing like this to not ruin them completely. (Dream ruined them, George wants to think, but that's not fair. It was still his fault too at the end of the day.)

Possibly, a part of him wants to ask about Dream still, despite everything, just to see how he's doing, if he's let his bed become accompanied to anyone else's body or if George is safe to breathe again. Maybe those thoughts have plagued him a bit too much, but with the ease at which the other said it, it'd be stranger for him not to fret.

Dream was everything that George wasn't. Self-assured. Confident.

A loss like that is bound to leave its cherry stained mark.

He doesn't ask though, because that would be wrong. When his lip is already being pulled between pearl teeth, and the hands that hold themselves right in front of his stomach (a nervous habit he was never quite able to shake clutch on tighter), George doesn't ask the thing that's screaming at him from the back of his mind. He doesn't run that risk, not when Sapnap's breath is already shaky and his face is ghost white.

This is affecting him too. In the sickest of ways that's almost pleasing to know, the bitter taste of need sitting dormant in George's mouth. Even if he's pretending the other never existed, Sapnap knows it isn't true. He knows and he's crumbling, just with a bit more support to prop him up.

So this time, George takes his own pride and forces it down, like his insides aren't trying to eat him alive and the twist in his stomach hasn't pulled until his organs are wrapped in one fatal loop. He steadies his own breath and looks face on, umber eyes meeting their faux-cold match, as he gives the weakest smile there is.

Pleading.

"Do you think we can talk later then?"

A sigh is crushing, better yet, it's all George hears.

He watches in blacking greys as Sapnap's head turns to Karl and Quackity, those eyes holding deceit in their glazed over fashion. This dismissal is so crude, he wants to think, when the knife digs in, so red and sharp when Sapnap doesn't answer his question, but those thoughts rule out the possibility that right now, he really isn't ready. That the other is allowed to not want to talk, to feel his own strangled emotions.

Either way, the embarrassment of being ignored is only heightened when Sapnap speaks to the others. "You guys have gym next, right?"

"Yeah," Karl nods. Quackity does the same.

They stand with awkward expressions and hands bundled by their sides, statures that grow weak at the neck as though the weight of their own limbs is dragging them down. Even without direct words, George can pick up on the subtleties of conversation—the glint in the eye that tells him he should go, that he isn't welcome.

And although it's not exactly news it still stings. He tried, didn't he? Why is it always him that has to try? Why can't anyone else just reach a hand out and realise that George isn't going to be sitting there waiting forever.

Maybe it's because they know he will.

As much as he hates to admit it, Sapnap (and Dream now too) know him like the back of their hands, able to read his emotions like it's his own personal fingerprint. They're awful like that. So close and yet so far.

Which means that when George steps back, stumbling, almost tripping over his own feet, that resentment that he'd tried to shove down can only come thrashing back up again—ruby red, like hellfire, or the knife that leaves his back as he curls his hand around its darkened handle.

This isn't his fault.

He can barely make eye contact with the others when he grabs the strap of his bag, pulling it over his shoulder so he can finally make his leave.

No, he can't blame himself for this, not when he's tried and he's tried and he's getting nothing in return.

Once, finally, before George really commits to leaving this hall he turns and tries to see if Sapnap is at least watching him, that way he'll know he cares at least a little bit. But when he looks up through strands of chestnut hair, lashes that are clumped and short and don't do anything to help his view, he sees nothing. No eyes on his back, or lips that sit flat as though they're hiding the words to call out and say 'stop.'



Three backs are turned to his and George is alone.

So pathetically alone.

Perhaps he rounds the corner with more force than necessary, strikes the door ahead with charge running from the palm of his hand, but what else is he meant to do? He feels far too much and somehow nothing at all, all at the exact same time.

There's no corner for him to turn down, not a soul to talk this out with and stop it all from lying heavily on his chest. Instead, George has to pretend that even with how he turned out to be, Dream was never a good listener. He has to pretend that a hug and a kiss to the forehead wouldn't make him swoon enough to forget these worries.

So this time, when anger hits, it's overwhelming.

He *tried*. Why couldn't it be enough? Why does he deserve to be stranded without a single crumb of dignity left in his all-too-empty roster?

Because Sapnap doesn't want to admit that he's never going to be the only person in George's life, even if he wants to be. He's not allowed to dictate who he speaks to just because George's decisions might somehow overlap with his, and if he thinks that he's going to change his mind on that then he's sorely mistaken. That's not how life works, George is never going to bend so easily for a guy that turned out to be nothing more than a jealous prick.

It's irrational and it's wrong but George revels in it.

His own emotions are heightened and screaming in the back of his mind, telling him all the things he shouldn't want to hear. They burn with frustration and ice out the mellow tones with the most blood-curling black, angry, vexing, so much so that George almost forgets he's still in this building, this public place and nearly screams his words then and there.

The beating of his heart is fast. Eventually he forces his breathing to stay slow.

Hiding in the bathroom while he tries not to choke probably isn't the best plan, but either way, that's what George ends up doing for the next two hours.

He knows he can't go out like this. He doesn't need one of Dream's friends seeing him and reporting back to their group later just how pitiful he looks now that he's been broken up with.

The small part of him that still wants to speak to Dream after that needs silencing, to be choked out and made quiet so he finally stops considering if Sapnap would even deserve to feel angry if he heard George did that now.

He shouldn't miss Dream. He shouldn't miss Sapnap either really, but stupidly, even through red tinted glasses—hate that simmers in the form of resentment deep in the pit of his stomach—he does.

One mistake and it's out, that's how it seems to be.

The shirt George wears is tight, uncomfortable as it clings to his chest, and with each passing moment he finds himself counting down the bitter blue seconds until the bell rings and he's finally allowed to move from his hiding spot in solitude. Reinsert himself in human life so he can trudge home and sleep this off.

Tomorrow is a new day, and Sapnap is a dick. That, George knows for sure.

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AP calculus is a hellish place.

It may be one of George's least favourite classes, long, boring and with a teacher that's never held a particular fondness for him and his daydreams. But it's bearable, that much he knows, because even if the work is difficult, when he's between four walls George doesn't have to think about anything outside of that room.

All names, all distractions, are pushed to the back of his mind with his greying thoughts and less favourable emotions. Abandoned for the now of a worksheet or the droning of his teacher. And with that knowledge, George thinks he can cope.

Or at least that's what he thought.

The window beside him is taunting—large and towering over a field of green and white, and George, for the most part, has managed to keep his eyes off of what goes on outside the glass, but sometimes his vision wanders, sometimes umber eyes can't help but drift.

It's a familiar scene when he takes his first glance, green grass, white lines marking each corner of the field, and George watches it as loosely as he can, favouring anything over the work right in front of his chest. Although familiarity is dangerous, warmth running flat until cold hits it, and before George can truly realise what he's looking at, umber eyes have settled on one figure. The very one he'd been wanting to forget.

It's Dream—unmistakably so, glazed with heat and sweat and pulling his shirt up to wipe his forehead where it shines.

George would hate him more if he was less attractive. That's the sin of pretty people, he thinks, though it's almost ridiculous to say, because George knows he's angry and he knows he can't forgive just yet, but allowing himself to revel in own angered thoughts somehow feels so much worse than it would be to let himself stare.

Because the window is wide and the glass is clear, and standing just outside is Dream laughing, smiling with his friends in a way that could almost be genuine. The corners are sharp, lips stretched into a grin that'd be so believable if it weren't for the falter at the end. It's fake, by any means, that's obvious enough from one single look, so why Dream is forcing it in front of the people that know him best—the ones he doesn't lie to, his actual friends—is question enough.

But maybe George just doesn't know what authenticity actually is. He spent months believing that this guy actually liked him for God's sake, but this he's sure of, this he can't mistake for anything else.

He should stop watching. Dream should stop pulling his gaze.

Where George leans his chin up on his hand, the tip of his own pinkie finger manages to pry between his lips, silencing him for the greater good. He's angry, angry and watching, wondering why the only guys he seems to be good enough for all end up being the ones he should stay away from.

One moment Dream is running back and the next he's catching a ball as it's thrown up into the air, the force almost causing him to stumble.

The small motion shouldn't make George laugh in the way that it does, breathless as he exhales through his nose and hums slightly. He almost thinks he was being too loud when he turns to see if his teacher is looking at him, but she's not, and so he turns back, tilting his head so it fits easier on his waiting palm.

Bitterness is grey as it corrupts each emotion; George, for whatever reason, knows he should glance away and yet he doesn't. He allows his eyes to settle on danger, wondering why his thoughts could ever betray him in this way, make him regret every second and wish they were longer all the same. Strained vision is difficult to maintain but George still does it, self destruction in the most pitiful of ways.

Maybe he should stop. Maybe he should go back to his work and make moving on easier for himself.

But then Dream looks up.

Dream looks up and George can feel his breathing falter.

Perhaps they're staring. Perhaps they're just mindless beings made only to catch eyes at the worst of times. But Dream lifts a hand and George tries not to flinch, because as inevitable as this may be, this was never in his plan. The other was never meant to be in his life.

It's a cold day out, Dream, in his simple shirt, must shiver because of the way the wind hits him. How he stands motionless with the ball in his grip.

This eye contact is bruising and George can feel his retinas burn. They stare without fault, without guilt, as though the world doesn't pass along around them, as though time can really freeze for long enough to allow them to look away. And throughout it all, the way George sits never changes, no one bumps him to ask if he's alright, and not even the teacher cares enough to see if he's paying attention.

Perhaps in the worst of ways, this scene is familiar, two sets of eyes, two scalding gazes, (George remembers every feature on the other's face, every freckle, every dot, each blinding imperfection that he'd traced with the tip of his finger and sworn to appreciate) except this time, when he looks it doesn't just feel wrong to find Dream attractive—it hurts.

It brings a knot to the top of his chest that simply sits, heavy. He should shake it away before the feeling rises to make itself evident on his features, a blushing red that's cherry with scorn instead of the type of heat that sits easily. His face is probably sullen, and his features likely droop in the most unattractive fashion, but that doesn't deter the other's staring, no matter how much George wishes it would.

Then, there is a moment that he knows he shouldn't entertain. Dream broke up with him, after all, if he cared about George in any way then why would he order him out of his home? Why would he give up on them so easily if it really was just a misunderstanding that needed to be hashed out? George shouldn't let his vision blur like this, not when his chest still hurts and his eyes feel dry, as though they're about to break.

Nevertheless, this is simplicity at its finest, the push and pull and the guilt of letting his own head be dragged under by these damning actions, and so when Dream raises his hand, slow as he gives the smallest of waves, George wants to scream at himself for raising his own palm in tandem, smiling weakly like that's something the other has earned.

They stop and they wave, and George's hand feels heavy as he holds it up.

At the back of his mind, he can see those lips spitting out harsh words and the sensible of him hates Dream for it—how used he makes him feel, how unwanted he ends up becoming. But he's dumb and he's bored, and AP Calculus seems to be the perfect place for the bad decisions.

George's throat feels tight; his blood is too hot to sit under his skin.

Still, it's over in seconds, when Dream realises he's still standing on the field in the middle of a game, and he's being tackled to the floor by a force that rams into his side and sends him toppling over. Silent, George watches him fall. Silent, he watches two arms stretch out and the wrist that lands first halt nothing.

That's the thing that forces him away, nudges George's chin so he looks anywhere else except that big open window and trains his gaze back to the board like he never even left.

A moment of weakness won't dictate his entire day. He's better off looking away than lingering on a wave that probably meant nothing to the other. There's no telling what goes on in Dream's head after all, no matter how sorry he pretends to be when he's leaving voicemails on George's phone and sending messages from a number that's only just been muted.

Honestly, he may not mean a word of it.

Which is exactly why George refuses to be fooled more than once.

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The rush of bodies feels so much more alarming when George is trying to navigate through them himself.

Class was long, and tedious all the same, and now, with his books pressed close to his chest and his lips pursed together in a tight, flat line, George has to try and make his way back through the door, out of the long and narrow hallway, and to the bus stop just outside, so he can wait by himself for not the first time this week, to finally make his way back home.

At some point this routine stopped getting easier and simply settled on tiresome. There is nothing fun about having to fight through other sweaty students that have barely discovered deodorant, much less cologne. And so George finds himself hiding behind a wall for around ten minutes until the crowds start to dissipate, so he can finally walk in peace.

But peace has to be an overstatement. Because his locker is close to the office doors, where they line students up and make them sit when they're waiting for a phone call home, or a meeting with a receptionist who likely doesn't even care about the problem they've just been presented with. And by those office doors is the end of everything, the very thing that makes his breathing grow heavy.

The universe has to be holding a serious grudge—that's the only explanation.

Dream, tall, blond, wide-eyed, Dream, is standing against the narrow walls, clutching his wrist with his right hand like there's something the matter with it. Five seconds is enough to look, for George to take one glance and see the way his hair is pushed up at the side, ruffled and messed while his expression bleeds boredom. And if his gaze hangs on the bruise that sits red just under his lip, where it splits and the piercing around it skews, then he snaps his eyes away before he can even recognise it.

He shouldn't be staring at bust lips and heavy eyes, not when the guy behind them is the very one who ruined him for the greater good.

Still, he stands stuck and he stands quiet, and he stares through the skin of the other, analytical with cynical eyes, shaking palms that drag sweat up his sides, bleeding blue like their anguish could ever be quiet enough not to notice. It feels so odd to be here, unavoidable, and maybe he should walk away before things get too real, but standing in an empty hallway, looking by himself, is the only place that George will be able to see him and not go running back to jewelled arms.

George can't *fix* him, there's no salvaging this.

Because it isn't black and white, this is the intertwining of painted strings, the red that was his heart and the blue that was his strength keeping him rooted firmly to the linoleum floor. Someone always gets hurt in these kinds of situations. Whether that be George, or Sapnap, or even Dream himself, so how the fuck is he meant to forgive the guy that's proved he lies for his own amusement so so many times.

How can he trust him? How can he believe any of the pleading words that leave that narrowed down mouth?

Still, his name sounds so pretty coming from between the other's lips. "George."

In his time away, it seems Dream finally noticed the other's proximity.

For a moment, George doesn't know what to say, finally snapping back into himself when he sees the other step forward, wrist still in hand. "Go away, Dream."

The harshness of his tone feels unnatural as it rolls from his own tongue; he half wishes the halls were busy, just so he wouldn't have to deal with *this*.

"What?" Dream asks, heavy. Light eyebrows are tugged up until they furrow, the piercing between two lips snagged by sharp teeth in consciousness, almost nervous, foreign in the simplest of ways.

"Don't speak to me," George breathes, as strongly as he can.

He should be walking away right now, not standing here and allowing nausea to wash over him, the lump wedged in his throat so tough to swallow around now that they're standing face to face.

"We should talk," Dream tries, relentless as always. The edge to his tone seems so unreadable now. Before, when they were still together, George could have taken it for need—the discreet compilation of emotion all blurring the words until the meaning becomes harder to interpret.

Now, when George hears it, all he can do is flinch, backing away with a sour expression on his face. There's almost something familiar about it.

Slow. Again. "Go away, Dream."

Being bitter isn't being immature, it's simply not allowing himself to be disrespected again, putting up barriers that are there to protect and not dropping his guard just because the other has decided that today he's sorry.

The step that Dream takes is cautious, his shoulders slumped when he tries to reach out and George just turns his back.

He doesn't need to go to his locker that badly, there's always tomorrow, it isn't worth it.

Maybe it's because he can still feel eyes on him even as he walks, that George isn't settled by his steady stalking away. The building is so much quieter now that he doesn't want it to be, and when his walk gets faster and the speeding of steps leads him into a brisk pace George can feel his heartbeat start to race alongside it, panicked for no reason at all.

It's a tightness in the pit of his stomach, a gnawing dreadful feeling that means that his own mind is screaming at him as he finally rounds the corner with his vision turning black and his nerves high. Because *fuck* if he was there any longer then he might have broke. If Dream just managed to scrape his fingertips over tensed skin then George would have crumbled right there against his hands.

Crudely, he wants the touch back. It's like he's craving it more than he ever should. It's insatiable and it's awful and—

George is colliding with another body before he can even think to open his eyes.

“Sorry,” he rushes out, overwhelmed, blinded.

Right now, all he wants to do is leave, not be here under harsh light any longer. He stumbles when he shouldn't, steps back to try and free himself before he's attached for too long, and it's all fine, it really is, up until he becomes all too aware of where he landed.

Sapnap is standing in front of him with confusion as he hurries back.

A tilt of the head means recognition. “George?”

“Sorry,” he splutters. Back, back, back, hands in the air in front of his chest because *god* he cannot handle this right now. “I didn't mean to—”

“Are you okay?” Sapnap asks, too quick, too careful.

“Yeah it's fine— I'm fine,” George has to say. “Sorry, just trying to get past.”

He isn't alone, he can see that now. Karl and Quackity are here because of course they are, they have to be spectators to his less than graceful descent. Not once is George allowed to slip in secret, his affairs always have to be public—frustration crawls up his spine, slow like its talons want to feel themselves beneath the skin.

“What?” Sapnap questions. “How come you're in such a rush? Did something happen?”

“No,” George huffs, because apparently he's huffing now. “Just let me pass.”

The shock on Sapnap's face is audible. Once merciless features now contorted.

In front of him, George can feel himself burn, the slope of his neck hunching over as white hot humiliation washes over him, like the only colour that his cheeks know is red.

Not now. He doesn't want to be here now.

So before the other can even think of the words to say, George is pushing by him like his lithe frame is strong enough to knock over mountains. His feet are moving before his mind, so quick that it takes him a moment to even remember to breathe. Because this is terrifying and embarrassing and he doesn't need anyone else here to witness his defeat.

Just when he's about to push through the double doors at the end of the hall, the sound of his own

name is snapping him back into reality.

*“George.”*

Sapnap’s voice sounds so clear, so distinct. George thinks he hates every syllable as they fall upon his open ears.

He has no place calling to him right now, he doesn’t have the right to do that, not when George is already breaking and hurting and is unable to do anything other than fall. If he wanted to talk then he would have done it earlier, opted for a time when the other wasn’t too foggy to really get to grips with his surroundings.

Perhaps that’s just how Sapnap is and he was too dumb to see it earlier. He doesn’t feel guilt or sorrow or even remorse for the situation he’s put him in, no. Sapnap only feels like he’s obliged to put the pieces back together. Like he’s got to be the saviour in this situation, that’s always got to be his role.

The thoughts come in strong waves, self-destructive and irrational because those are the easiest ones to have. Possibly, at the back of his mind, George knows that he’s being harsh. Possibly, these thoughts aren’t deserved, but right now it’s the only thing that’s keeping him sane.

“Fuck,” he mumbles, under his breath.

This building is taking the life from him. It’s ruining the guy that George thought he was. The one that didn’t cry himself to sleep each night, or even think about betraying the guy that’s only ever shown him kindness. Death is painful, and it is slow, and somehow, George thinks that it would be easier than this.

His bus ride is long, and he sits in the back by himself. It’s the bitter kind of torture that he’s starting to get used to. Quiet feels isolating and George’s thoughts like to scream at him when he doesn’t have anyone else there to dull the noise. No Dream, no Sapnap, no one that gives a shit about where he is or how he’s doing beyond surface level.

So yes, it’s painful and it’s isolating, and the very worst part of him is starting to wonder if the only thing left to do is let that resentment consume him.

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Driving is dumb.

Or at least that’s what George thinks.

Perhaps it’s because he never got his licence. If he wanted to then he could’ve, but he never took the test, and since then he’s been getting used to the bus and lifts from Dream to get him where he needs to go, so there was no real point in following through.

Right now though, he thinks, it wouldn’t hurt to have a car of his own, just so he’d be able to take himself out for once with the hum of a built-in radio, just so he’s not in his room watching the clock on his monitor tick away with the remnants of his sanity, for the fifth time that week.

It’s been a few days since he last went into class. Not for any reason in particular, he just hasn’t been feeling up for it as of late. “Taking a mental health break,” his mother called it. Which at first

he had been thoroughly against, because he's not *depressed*, though there would be no shame if he was, he just didn't want to go in and be the centre of negative attention for the tenth time that week.

But after a few hours of careful deliberation, and a shitty rom-com that made him feel far worse than it did good, he started to warm to the idea.

A 'mental health break,' he can get behind that.

So now, he's sitting comfortably atop the indent in his couch, drowned in a hoodie that's actually his own for a change, and sipping hot cocoa like the weather isn't getting warmer outside. Strangely he wants to go for a drive. Even odder, he doesn't mind if it's just in his own company.

Upon reflection, perhaps some of his judgments had been a little hasty. There was no need to sprint down a hallway just because he saw his ex at the end of it, and there was also no need to get so snappy after running into Sapnap like that. Some of his decisions are flawed, George knows that now. That doesn't mean he isn't still a little peeved.

The fact that after everything, Dream has the audacity to pretend his words didn't cut deeper than the sharpest knives, and Sapnap's complete one-eighty since the last time they spoke, manages to make George's blood boil like nothing else.

It's like they both think that no matter what he'll just be there for them, like he's not his own person with thoughts and feelings, who is perfectly capable of making decisions by himself. Quite frankly, it's hurtful, though George isn't sure if they care about hurting him. They've proven time and time again not to care about his well being.

So, in an effort to move forward, he's decided to stop thinking about it. Point blank.

Today the sky is clear. Apricot and amber swirling in such a tangled manner. Today, when George looks out of the window he doesn't feel like bursting into tears. For once, all he feels is calm.

It's like nothing and everything at the same time, clear white like a lens has been placed in front of his eyes to dull the umber and make it mellow. He quite likes this new feeling, it's almost nice—very different from the dread he's become so accustomed to.

So tonight, just tonight, not tomorrow or the day after, or at any moment other than this, George will close his eyes and pretend that nothing has changed. That Dream didn't fuck him over and then realise his mistake only days later, when that thought is meaningless. Because George's feelings aren't that easy, regret burns him every time he thinks he may be able to shut them off, and Dream, the one guy he was told to never get involved with, cost him his best friend and every ounce of morality he had left.

Still, even though it's not something he should indulge in, guilty pleasures are often the things that feel too shameful to admit out loud, he still allows for his mind to roam. Delving into the dirty little secrets, all those sins that are wrapped up pretty in a golden bow that he's managed to tuck away until it's deemed appropriate to tap into them.

In some ways, they're perfect for each other, George thinks, because as awful as Dream may be, he's still in every corner of his head, lurking like there's some leaf left unturned that he won't surrender without.

Nevertheless, it's not something he should let himself think about.

So he closes his eyes and pretends that everything is back to normal. Even if it isn't.



Coping has never felt so difficult.

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One morning George looks in the mirror and can barely recognise himself.

His hair has gotten longer since the last time he checked, grown unruly like the strands want to outgrow themselves in fast competition. Tawny brown has started to turn chestnut too, it's half a surprise that the ends aren't greying, because with the amount of stress George has been under he wouldn't be surprised by it at all.

"Jesus," he mutters, picking at one fallen piece to pull it down past his nose so he can see where it ends above his lips.

It's not a terrible look, he has to admit, but something about it feels wrong, like he's keeping it there for nothing. Maybe he should just suck it up and get a haircut already. There's nothing stopping him, really.

Except for the fact he's kind of gotten used to seeing himself like this, the times before he showers, the ones where he'll peer too long at his reflection and pick himself apart. To be frank, the routine has started to feel normal. Wake up, pretend that one week was enough to pull all the pieces back together, then stalk down the hallways as though there's a dark cloud spitting fire above his head.

All is fine, as long as he doesn't let the weather affect him.

Dream called this morning. George didn't pick up the phone to answer but he saw. In all honesty, he half wishes he didn't.

Things only seemed to get worse when later he went back to class and standing outside the door was none other than Dream. He smiled, half-heartedly, and didn't raise his hand for it was in some sort of makeshift sling, an odd addition, George had to admit, because a nu metal hoodie and a white brace seems to clash in pure contrast in front of his chest. But he didn't stay long enough to say that. In fact, this time, George didn't even smile back.

It's not still because he's angry though, but because letting himself succumb to cherry lips and silver smiles wouldn't be the smartest of ideas. He's holding himself to a higher standard, there's no chance he'll be lowering himself to Dream's level. If the other really wants anything from him then he'll just have to raise himself up. There's no meeting in the middle—if he wants him that bad then he'll do something better than look.

That's not to say George isn't flawed though.

As he stands here, pulling apart the knots in his hair and grimacing at his own reflection in the fogged-up mirror, George can see all of the cracks that sit in porcelain skin.

Kitchen scissors—heavy in his hands as he lets them glide against the ends of his hair, slowly measuring out the strands they need to let go of. Perhaps the reason why he can't bring himself to make the chop is unclear, but George still listens to the voice in the back of his mind that tells him it isn't worth it.

Change won't come from a poorly done haircut. Instead it comes when he reaches for his phone and mutes calls from the number he doesn't want to see.

Tomorrow is a new day. Tomorrow he won't be the same as he was, when he put the scissors down and went to sleep.

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20 dollars. 20 whole fucking dollars.

When the money had been pressed into his palm George wasn't too sure what to make of it, what was he expected to do with 20 dollars after all? But his mother had explained it as him deserving a treat after the last few weeks, even if she didn't know the full story. So here he is a few hours later, sitting on his bed scrolling through the nearest food delivery places and wondering if a large pizza would be too much or if he should just get a medium to be safe.

In the end he does decide on a large, with all the toppings they would allow and a cookie in case he's still peckish after. It's ridiculously expensive and if he was really *that* hungry then he could have just made double from the freezer and not blown his entire spending's in one go just like that. But it's more to do with the principle of things. This is a one-off, why not spend a little?

So he taps in his order and the receipt pops up in black, bold and bright and telling him to come pick things up and pay in a half hour, once everything's ready, made and packed and ready to go. Logically, George knows that it'll take him twenty minutes in of itself to get there by foot—the deal he made with himself to justify it all—but he's shrugging on his jacket before another minute is allowed to pass.

Might as well go early, there's nothing else to do after all.

Oddly, it seems the sun is getting dimmer this time of year, not staying out as long and hiding behind the clouds for the few moments that it can actually be seen. In a sense, George thinks that he prefers it this way. The rainstorms and the spitting is one thing, but there's something calming about the chill. Like, when he walks, it doesn't have to be in silence. He'll have the pitter-patter to drop alongside his steps. So it's not that bad, things could always be worse.

Although right now, it's dry outside. Half-heartedly, he wonders if the weather is stealing the moisture from his skin—the colour from his cheeks, as muted red (once mulberry, painted in pomegranate and so sweet to see) has faded back to white. Blotchy, watered down, white.

One day, maybe he'll make an effort to bring back the warmth. Today won't be that day though. Today, all he wants to do is treat himself, and sometimes, ignoring the problem is the healthiest thing that he can do.

The pizza place is pretty small in comparison to everything else in the town, although there's nothing exactly special about anything there. But here in particular has always stood out as less than, with peeling painted walls and a light up sign that never really worked. The food is good though. If it wasn't, then he wouldn't be going out of his way to actually pick things up.

(Most places have delivery nowadays, it seems that this place is still a little behind the times.)

Windowed walls and glass doors and when he finally reaches the entrance he only has to push lightly to be walking through, immediately washed with the white, unnatural bulbs from above. It's warm, sudden, sudden warmth filling his senses with heat, and as soon as George looks up, he feels that heat rush straight to his head.

It's just his luck. One step forward and three steps back, always.

"Oh." The word claws its way out of George's chest before he can force it down. "You work here?"

It almost sounds too casual for him to really be saying, a little too informal for such an odd afternoon.

In front of him, behind the counter, dressed in grey and red and wearing an expression that can only scream 'shock,' Dream stands and stares. In a certain sense, it's almost comical to see his jaw drop.

"Yeah— yeah I started last week," he scrambles, looking like he had to snap himself back into reality to even say it. "I needed something to do."

*Cool.* Apparently, Dream just had to get a job at the only good pizza place in town. That's not annoying, not annoying at all.

There's a pause between words and the movement of a hand is tracked by amber eyes, as Dream tries to lift his fingers to his hair, and the white of a bandage seems to stop him in his tracks. For whatever reason, the hand is cast up, wrapped with beige-coloured strips that only leave his thumb and four fingers on show. A part of George wants to ask; the most sensible part of himself knows it would be dumb.

Momentarily, Dream waits. "What are you doing here?" He asks, confused, puzzled, maybe, but ultimately, so grating.

"Picking something up," he shrugs.

Acting casual is so difficult, especially when his feet are dragging against the floor, doing their constant best to stop him from tripping up.

His eyes are wandering, over every freckle, each mole. Every time he thinks he's done he always seems to find something new that he hadn't quite noticed before. It's a death sentence of sorts, one that means he can see every single change before he even becomes aware of it in full—all including the lack of silver hugging the other's cherry lip.

Professional means no piercings apparently. Somehow, Dream doesn't feel like *Dream* without it.

He's snapped out of his mind fairly quickly though. Furrowed brows and pursed lips catching his eye before he could indulge too much.

Dream's tension sits in his shoulders. "You didn't know I had a job?" He asks, like he assumed the other would even care otherwise.

Arms cross, the counter getting closer as George walks towards it, leaving the empty space behind him so stagnant as it waits. "Why would I?"

"I don't know," he mumbles. "Sapnap might have mentioned it or something."

It's almost laughable, how Dream's eyes flick down and his lips tug up for half a second before dropping back down to crush the expression he tried to wear. The features George knows best are contorted today, and as much as he wants to say the flashing makes him content, it doesn't. All it does is bring back unease.

"Well, me and Sapnap aren't on speaking terms at the moment," he tells him, even though he

shouldn't. Right now, he should just be standing to one side and waiting for his food, not making idle conversation with the enemy, no matter how inviting it is. "That shouldn't be a surprise though."

"I didn't—" Stuttering seems so out of character and yet Dream does it anyway. "Sorry, I thought you guys were talking again."

Stiffness takes George's spine and forces it straight. "Why would you think that?"

"No reason, just something he said." Dream explains, ominous as always. It's one of those things that George can't say that he hates but he does, more than even he can understand. "Guess I was wrong."

There's something so foreign about this scene, on any other occasion George would have thought he'd seen more people out, more workers at the very least, but here it really seems to be only him that's out. Him and Dream, and empty, empty tables.

Well, not exactly. There's a kitchen behind them, even if he hasn't been back there himself he's smart enough to see the open walls and grey panelling that brings the divide between the front and the back. Things would be easier if Dream was back there, he muses, out of sight and out of mind, not bothering him by locking his lips behind his teeth and chewing down nervously.

It's a taunt, in a way, and there's something so hurtful about taunts. This unforgiving thing called 'them' managing to thrive off of the danger of a *taunt*.

Bile is in the back of George's throat. He tastes it and it burns when he attempts to swallow.

For once, he thinks he's deserving of a straight up answer, a full explanation that won't leave him asking more at the end of the day. Because why on earth would the other think that Sapnap, *Sapnap* of all people, who at the moment hates George's fucking guts, would have told him that his brother got a job?

He's already made his stance on that.

They've already reaped the consequences of closeness.

And so he won't probe it, because Dream actually wanted to tell him then he'd do it on his own, and the embarrassment of asking just isn't worth it. Blue can turn to grey in an instant, and the stardust in his eyes can fizzle out just the same.

He uses his own arms to hold himself close, standing straight in front of the counter and looking up like this doesn't intimidate him at all. "Yeah," he nods, patronising. "Can you get my order? It said it should be ready now."

It shouldn't; there are still ten minutes left to wait.

Dream doesn't know that though. "Yeah of course, can you just show me the receipt?"

Stumbling with his thumbs feels so much worse when there's someone watching him do it. Eyes are on his chest, his face, as he digs into his pocket, past the 20 dollars to his phone where he presses meaninglessly to find the thing he needs to show. It's awkward almost, like silence, now that they've spoken, is the single worst thing that could follow.

Yelling would almost feel better. With the rising frustration, George thinks he would find it therapeutic to shout.

His hands don't shake when he turns the screen to face the other. They tremble, as he'd like to call it, because shaking, feels like terror, and this isn't terror. This is the redness rushing to his face, the humiliation of having to get too close and make sure the other can actually see what's being shown, hitting all at once.

Dream's fingers brush against his when he goes to swipe over the letters, cold and quick and so light it almost feels like it's ghosting. There was a time when George would lean into it, let his heart face because exhilaration just has to do that to his head, but this time when he feels his chest jump it isn't pleasant.

Flinching back is only second nature.

"Sorry," he says shortly, pulling away before he can feel metal rings and re-evaluate everything.

This anger is justified. He's not going to forgive just like that. So if he thinks he sees Dream's features soften, then he ignores it. It's a trick of the mind, there's no way that any of it is actually real.

"So, you're paying here?" Dream asks, almost like small talk is replaced with work. "It says 'incomplete.'"

"Yeah," he nods, trying to keep his cool, but there's still something choked about it, like breathlessness wants to take him by the throat. "I've got the money."

"Cool."

With his phone in hand, George steps back, watching as Dream types something into the machine ahead.

There's a second where he wonders if they'll stay in this limbo forever, awkward silence ringing over it all, but that wishful thinking is squashed almost immediately. As Dream sucks in a breath and tries to speak without a fault. Introductory, almost. "Uh— George, do you think we could talk? My shift ends in an hour and I really need to speak to you."

The audacity of it almost catches him by surprise. But this is Dream he's talking to—always full of surprises.

"No."

The surprise in the other's voice almost makes him want to shriek. "What?"

"I'm saying no Dream. Not now, not ever. No."

"But—"

Biting out a scoff and laying low has never felt this easy. "You purposefully led me on for months just to hurt your own brother, I don't want to talk to you." Breathe through the nose. Pretend that this isn't something he's wanted to do since he first found out. (Maybe his tone is harsh, maybe his intent is to hurt, but it feels too deserved to let this opportunity pass by.) "The fact that you think I would is humiliating."

Crestfallen is the only way to describe Dream's face. "I just want to apologise."

*Apologise.* An apology doesn't take back the things that have already happened.

“It’s too late, I don’t care,” he lies. An apology wouldn’t fix a thing but he can’t just shut off his humanity, of course he would care. At one point, (George barely even knows if he’s past it) Dream meant everything to him. “Do you have any idea how I feel? How fucking embarrassing it was to find out that the things everyone has been trying to show me for months is actually true—that you’re no better than the rumours and I’m an idiot for actually believing that you were into me.”

Distress is dragging. It makes nausea so bright and cruel. “George please.”

“Save it,” he bites. “You did this, not me.”

The steps the other takes are careful, pulling him back, away it almost feels. When the distance is put back between them the bulb above flickers, yellow, white, blinding in particularity. It almost feels like it’s egging him on, begging him to sharpen his gaze and stare up like nothing at all can get to him.

It’s not sensible, but at this point, where can sense really get him? He’s already alone.

“Don’t spit in my food.”

A final jab, unnecessary even on his own tongue.

The fact that even now, when he’s standing in a wrinkled work uniform and sweating under artificial heat, Dream still manages to look alright, hurts more than anything. Because George can see it, and he can miss it, and it just makes the danger of it all seem like it was never really worth it. Now, he’s not even allowed to admire, they’re fucked for good, admiration only pains him to see.

Messy hair was even more ruffled in the mornings, after naps or prolonged periods of just existing in each other’s presence. Sandy blond is such a gorgeous colour, the dots of freckles seem so deliberately placed now that he’s not allowed to look.

It manages to make sickness feel more damning, irritation far more fatal.

Dream’s eyebrows knot together. “You really think I would do that?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” A scoff, clipped, biting. “Could be a fun story to tell to the next person you have ‘round.”

Times like these he’s glad he only decides to eat at the oddest hours of the day. Any time earlier and they might have had an audience. Someone to watch as his composure starts to crumble, close to a dart piercing glass, shattering so loud that only he can hear it.

“Don’t do this.” Dream almost sounds pathetic, pleading in a pitiful sense.

“Do what? Actually believe the things you say?” George asks, a rise in his chest. The audacity of it all still manages to fuck with him. How *dare* Dream speak like he’s not the one in the wrong, like he didn’t cause this whole entire thing in the first place. “*You* broke up with *me*, so I really don’t know why you’re acting so heartbroken about it.”

There’s a call from the back. A voice that’s loud enough to rip them from their tension, fill the air back with blue when it was slowly being taken over.

“Dream?”

It’s effeminate and questioning, and George knows perfectly well that anything akin to jealousy

isn't justified. It's a coworker, not a *threat*, there's no reason for his breath to be catching and his lips to clamp shut straight after. Spiralling, madness, none of it is worth it. *But what if Dream really has found someone else?*

He has to look away before the other can see the redness growing in his eyes.

Humiliation—embarrassment at its highest point.

“What?” Dream asks, hushed as he barely turns his head.

There's the raise of a hand, unamused eyes flicking from Dream to George and then back again before the sight just disappears. She's pretty, George notes. One day, he thinks that this feeling will kill him.

“Order's done, bag it.”

Then it's over before he can even think to skim the top.

Heaviness is the feeling that sits over his chest. Frustration and anger and all things red bubbling up alongside it. This can't be good for him, this rush of everything all at once so bad for his heart and his mind all the same. When Dream turns to grab the box and find the bag it goes in, he half thinks that he can feel a part of himself tear apart.

“And stop arguing with the customers.”

A glare before she goes. “Don't.”

George has to stop himself from mimicking it. ‘*Don't.*’

They aren't together, it almost feels like he has to remind himself of that when he watches Dream struggle with only one hand, the other bandaged and sticking close to his side—out of commission and causing him to flinch when he accidentally knocks it against the counter.

Harsh lights. Blond hair. If he looks close enough then he'll be able to see the little hole under his lip where a piercing would normally be threaded through. God, he shouldn't be thinking like this, he shouldn't still be hanging on.

The moment that Dream turns around is the one where everything seems to fall apart.

“George—”

Be bitter, he's forced to think, these simple things shouldn't get him as distraught as this. This is the guy that hurt him, the one that doesn't give a shit about how he feels, still pretending he knows him because he wants to prove a point.

“George?” Dream repeats.

Hurt is all that will come from entertaining it, and humiliation is all that the other can feel when he sees the bag being placed down on the counter.

“Are you sure you don't want to talk?”

Viridian green burns every place that it touched.

George doesn't think he's capable of giving an answer that keeps composure. So he doesn't:

“Keep the change.”

And the money is shoved down onto the counter, hard like steel hands want to leave their everlasting mark on the slab. Perhaps in the mornings, the knuckles that bruise against the edge will be rouged with mulberry, tattered for only him to see and run his eyes across, but George thinks it's worth it.

To see the pain in Dream's lying eyes, and watch the remnants of a merciful expression fall, is worth it. Even if for a moment, it tugs at a single string inside of the other's chest.

Leaving is quick; the bag isn't heavy.

Ice (grey-blue) is forced into George's final glare, the one he shoots before he finds his way out of the door, nothing left over from that stupid 20 dollars left in his pocket, because it's starting to seem like somewhere along the way he mustered up the self control to not go running back to the things that hurt.

No matter how many times Dream has to beg, they're done.

Nobody will make a fool out of George more than once.

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Self care books are actually a lot more useful than George had originally thought.

They tell him: A *'do not cut your hair,'* B *'Do not get behind the wheel of that car,'* (whether it's for learning purposes or not), and C *'forgiveness isn't as weak as some people make it out to be.'* In fact, sometimes it's rather liberating.

Because before, if George saw resentment as this all-powerful, ruby red force, that he was bound to until he realised that people actually are black and white, they aren't piled with emotions, or complex and flawed in the very way he is, then he saw forgiveness as the softer blue that mellowed it out. The thing he was meant to avoid. The one he was always going to stray from.

That's not to say he isn't angry, because he is. Dream has managed to crawl inside his mind and stay settled there in all the uncomfortable nooks until just the thought of his name is enough to make his skin crawl. He's disgusting, and he's awful, and George wants nothing to do with him.

But still, at the exact same time, he's lonely.

One day, just after class, George is making his way to the bus stop when he sees Sapnap and Karl, and maybe Quackity too, shuffling into Dream's car like they have somewhere that they need to be. He sees the smile on Sapnap's face and he doesn't quite catch a glimpse of Dream but he knows that he's there and it burns. It hurts more than ever imaginable.

Later that day, he hears his phone ring and he ignores it, because he knows exactly who it is. Like clockwork, *he* calls, knowing he'll never get an answer but still doing it because he can. A part of George feels bad for snapping at him the last time he saw him—perhaps that's self improvement, or maybe just tiredness.

Because quite frankly, George is exhausted. There's only so much skincare and chick-flicks a guy can take before it starts to feel less like self help and more a way to stifle self-loathing. But he



doesn't do anything about it, because he's learning to forgive. And right now that means not trying to fill old, bitter blue memories with new even better ones. That's too much like forgetting.

There's a time during lunch where George returns to the library and he hears the voice of the guy that hates him, and pretends that he never even knew the owner. Sweating he turns away, panicked he looks to the floor, but sure enough when he looks back, Sapnap is staring. Watching like his careful gaze will be enough to make porcelain skin shatter, blood and bones fragile like glass as they finally succumb to years of torture.

They break underneath him. They leave George motionless.

Still, Sapnap doesn't relent and George is starting to hate it.

Why after all this time does he finally decide he wants to look? Why does he pay attention when the breaking point is already so far in the past? When they're no longer anything and George is just the tattered remains?

Anger takes up too much effort though. Instead of letting himself feel the things he shouldn't, he simply takes a stand and forces himself to leave—feet dragging along the carpeted floor, like that contact with the earth will be the thing that grounds him for good and stops him from falling too far.

He sits in the cafeteria and wishes he could at least pretend he heard a calling of his name as he went, but he didn't. It'd be too ridiculous to even hope.

Maybe later when he goes to sleep, George will toss and turn in his bedsheets, because the weather feels too warm for the actual time of year, and his skin, tacky, pale, and blooming in the most unpleasant red, is sticking to itself and causing almost everything to just feel wrong. He'll card his fingers through his hair and pretend that honey isn't the scent in his shampoo, that the shirt he's wearing is his own and this isn't just a pathetic display of self-restraint. (Or lack thereof.)

Eventually sleep comes, dragging him under with its blanket of need. Though his limbs are heavy and his conscience is low, George knows that he doesn't want to fight anymore.

And not for anyone else, but himself.

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Saturday morning. The ten A.M fog is almost too crisp to bear.

At seven, George was woken by the sound of a tree branch clattering against his window, tapping once, twice, then three times just to ensure it found his full attention. Though the wind was light, the sun barely up and struggling to claw its way through the greying clouds and instead settled behind a screen, so it could just barely light up the sky.

Despite his best efforts to not let the noise disrupt his day, half an hour later he was jolted again by the sound of the front door closing—his parents leaving for work, trying to give him time to sleep in because nowadays they don't know what to do with him. *Day one: they ask what's wrong and George slams his door. Day two: they learn he's still too childish to want to talk.*

So come ten, George has just barely brushed his teeth and has already downed two bottles of water then eaten three slices of heavily buttered toast (heaven, in his oh so important opinion.) And now

he's lying, wearing the clothes he went to bed in, on the couch and wondering if spending the whole day indoors is as sad as some people make it out to be.

Probably not. He'll be fine.

The TV is loud as it glares yellow into the air, flickering and flashing and barely functional when he jams the same button three times over in the hopes of finding a channel that he actually likes.

Nothing is more tiring than everything, it seems. And George can feel his eyes growing heavy before it even turns eleven, fingertips dragged down by invisible weights as the lack of sleep starts to finally catch up.

Letting himself succumb to the feeling seems so great too. When his eyes fall shut and umber is blocked by a shutter drawing closed. It's almost peace in a sense. Comfort.

But of course even a moment's rest is too much.

The buzz of George's phone is enough to ruin his day.

He doesn't reach for it at first, thinking whatever it is will simply go away, but when it beeps again and the sound of it vibrating against the coffee table gets a bit too much, he figures there's no harm in at least checking what it is—even if he doesn't do anything about it.

So George sits up, and he leans forward, and he goes to check his notifications before he can really consider how bad of an idea this could be. He still doesn't understand the effect of his own dire actions. Because what's there, on the screen in front of him is enough to make his breathing halt, dark eyes widening and stomach beginning to twist.

For a moment, he doesn't even believe it, chalks it up to some sick, sleep-driven hallucination that's been planted in his head by his own deteriorating brain, but when he pinches his arm, then pinches it again, it's clear that this isn't a dream.

This is real.

***Sapnap:***

*Hey*

*Can we talk?*

---

Stress is a feeling like no other.

When it comes to stress, or fear, or anything of the sort, George doesn't know how to cope.

Sometimes he wrings his hands together and clutches shaking palms between themselves, holding himself just to soothe, hoping to ground his body back in bitter reality. On other occasions he lets the feeling consume him. If Eve ate the apple and Adam bore witness, then George would have been the deity that watched and wondered if he'd have to speak what he knew to a crowd that would judge him on how easily it came out.

If he lied to protect them, or saved himself by speaking sour.

This isn't that though. Right now, George has nothing left to hide. And even if he did, any words he tries to say will only come out in a clumsy, hellish voice. There's no point in working himself up, which is why, now, he doesn't even afford himself the opportunity to feel stress.

At 1pm one afternoon, George is barely awake. Earlier that morning the rain had made itself apparent by falling slow against the shallow glass of his window, leaving track marks along the back that are still resting there hours later. The pitter-patter was loud against nothing else, simple silence that spawned from nothing being overruled by its glaring noise. Now though, it's quiet outside. Perhaps, that's why they chose to stay here instead of going in.

Maybe it was the poor host in George wouldn't allow him to invite Sapnap properly into his house, but the other didn't mind. In fact, when he turned up with slumped shoulders and meekness greying in his expression, George wasn't too sure if he'd mind anything at all.

Still, they're here, sitting on George's doorstep, in the only space that he can call his own, and waiting for the tension to blow over. Wondering if with enough time, the thickness of the air, all the splinters between the atoms, will dissipate.

It feels far too familiar.

At the moment, George isn't sure if he wants it to be.

"I've missed it here," Sapnap says, cross-legged on the floor in front of him.

He asked to sit there, George didn't tell.

In fact, Sapnap seemed far too at ease with the whole idea that George didn't want him in; he sat down without question and acted as though the shrug he wore and the shaking of his hands was normal and that they didn't have anything to be weirded out over, but George knows the truth.

When Sapnap messaged him he didn't offer too much of an explanation, simply texted to see if the other was free to talk and then said they could meet the next day. It's not *normal* and it's not the standard that they've pinned themselves to. It's all sick turmoil and twisted stomachs.

Quiet rings before anything else.

"Are you here to yell at me?" Is the first thing George asks, blunt in every possible way.

There's a slight chill to the air that he hadn't anticipated, one that means he's close to shivering in his plain, simple tee.

*Be bitter*, he thinks. Maybe then, he'd feel as though he's putting his own feelings first. (Though doing that is the very thing that got him into this mess, stepping back and allowing himself to be shouted at may actually be what stops his moping. Sapnap's hurt too, why can't he bite his own tongue and let himself bear the brunt of it?)

Sapnap shakes his head. "No," he laughs weakly. "I'm past yelling."

It almost sounds like defeat. Still, George shrugs. "Me too."

When the last syllable rings, the fear that they'll be plunged back into silence comes with it. Thankfully, Sapnap doesn't allow that to happen. Instead, he lets his words burst out almost immediately.

"Are you angry at me?"

For a moment, George doesn't know how to breathe. *Anger*, the very feeling that had made itself a permanent resident in the pit of his stomach, clawing and red and so hard to remove even after he'd done everything he could to be rid of it.

He's been angry, he's felt anger.

He let himself be wrung through all of the emotions, hitting them headfirst until he could vow that he was past them. Always, he'd be better than that, he said he was. Still, the question manages to dig into cracking skin.

Because it's not the feeling that he's unfamiliar with, it's the person asking.

"Am *I* angry?" He finally manages to splutter out, stumbling over every word like they're foreign on his cherry tongue. "Shouldn't I be asking you that?"

"You can, if you want," the other offers, almost like it's easy. "But I figured I should ask too." A pause. "I haven't exactly been the nicest these past few weeks."

Agreement feels like a trap, a spiderweb that sticks no matter how easy he thinks it would be to escape. So the first words on his lips, he lets die, allows them to drown on his tongue so he can't let anything regretful slip.

"I'm the one that caused it," he ends up mumbling, truth in a thinly veiled disguise.

It all seems to hang in the air for a moment, quiet to be said, blue to be heard.

"I know," Sapnap nods. "And I wish you hadn't, but I still miss you." Shallow breathing. "I wanted to talk."

Disproportionate responses and bitten out laughs. George can only hear so much before he's scoffing. This has to be a joke, there's no way that after everything Sapnap still wants to see him.

Maybe that mentality causes his tone to sharpen, pinkened features contorting into complete aversion. Sometimes, he feels as though he could know everything and still nothing at all. "Really? You ignore me for weeks and now you want to talk? That's rich."

That tone plants the roots for uneasy waters, sparks the light from which the fire will spread, because after all this time, George isn't going to just let this happen. He's not about to beg for forgiveness in an instant like that's not what he's been trying to do for weeks.

It's too little too late, why does Sapnap decide that now will be the time where he believes in reconciliation?

*Breathe.* An instruction so simple, changing the tide in an instant.

(These thoughts are unfair; they don't allow space and they don't allow for George to see past himself. This conversation isn't on his terms and that's okay, not every conversation will be, but before anything, he's not going to fold. Not even for Sapnap. Sapnap, who weeks ago would have met fire with fire, poured water on the gas flames to see how far he could push for the other to finally snap.)

Apologies come second, and yet loose lips are so close to pouring them out.

George wants his friend back. He really does.

Still, he's more than confused when the voice that leaves the other's throat speaks mellow. Sapnap doesn't argue, he doesn't even look defensive.

"I can be a bit of an idiot sometimes," he admits. "I was pissed at you dude, it was the only thing I had ever asked and you couldn't even do it for me."

"That doesn't mean you can just ditch me for weeks on end, I had no-one," George snaps, speaking before he can think of something sensible. "Seriously, fuck you."

A sharp intake of breath.

Quite frankly, it takes him a moment to remember their surroundings, the open air that sits against his skin and regulates the tone that should be spilling from his lips. He can't speak like this. It does more harm than good, and even if the coldness doesn't strike him back down into reality, the expression on Sapnap's face definitely does.

"I shouldn't have said all that," he breathes. When panic rises up there is nothing he can do but succumb. Sapnap hates him, he's never going to be forgiven now. He just blew it in ten seconds flat. "You just came to talk and I'm—"

"I'm sorry."

One second is all it takes for George's world to be flipped. "What?"

"You're right. I'm sorry," Sapnap nods. "I've been a pretty awful friend recently."

"I don't—" George can't get his head to work. "I don't understand."

Unstoppable, the collapse of emotions feels like a pit is tearing itself into his stomach.

It's sudden breaths—ones that he didn't even know he was going to take—forcing out of his airways as that heavy feeling sinks and drags and makes it feel like the knot in his throat is attached to an anchor that's only line of sight is 'down.' A part of him, the sickly part, the one that even after all the so-called 'self help' can't forget the last few months no matter how hard he wishes for it to, *burns*.

It's like, for once, George isn't the only one in the wrong.

Somehow, it feels hard to accept.

"I was still the one that went behind your back," he says, slowly, questioning, like if he sits up too straight or speaks too loud, then he'll wake up and realise that none of this is real. That the Sapnap in front of him was never there in the first place. "I hurt you."

But even after everything, he's still sitting.

"And I hurt you too," he shrugs, like it's as simple as that. A fact that they both should know slipping from his tongue like the humanity of it all doesn't scold him. "We were both pretty shitty to each other at the end of the day."

"You're telling me," George jokes.

They're joking now. They're back to joking.

"So I'm sorry," Sapnap says. "You should know that—it should have been the very first thing I said."

There's something mature about it, enviable, almost.

"Fuck," George groans, forcing his eyes away.

The guy in front of him is strong. He's smiling, to a degree.

And to George, as he breaks and crumbles and acts as though the cold isn't making him stiff, apologies come easier than excuses.

"I'm sorry," he breathes. When the world goes on around them, he doesn't know if he should laugh or cry, because he doesn't say 'too' because it sounds like skirting around the problem and he doesn't look up because he fears that in doing so he'd shatter all at once, so the hum of the air and the whistling of the wind does its very best to ground him where he sits.

No matter what, the earth will keep spinning.

When his hands arc in swathed light, and the renaissance painting that they belong to becomes tattered and ruined, drowned in the red that can only come from knifepoint, there'll be no change to the landscape that he knows. They're both nothing, and it's taxing.

A thunderstorm would bring more clarity.

Coiled weight sits at the top of his lungs, two knees tucking up, close to his chin to bring back familiarity. And when George grips around them, he can't help but notice the lack of blood.

"Can't believe I'm sitting here right now," Sappnap sighs. It feels like relief to hear, like a weight, heavy and just, has been lifted from his shoulders, finally allowing for him to sit straight. "I bitched to Karl and Quackity for a week straight, they kept telling me to just go and apologise to you, guess they were right about a few things."

"They don't hate me?" George asks. He has to, it's one of the first things on his mind.

"What?" Sappnap almost seems scandalised by the idea. "No, of course not. I think they hate me a bit more for kicking you out of our friend group." He pauses for a second—waits. "Don't get me wrong, I still think you deserved part of it. You did go behind my back to date my brother."

This time it's not a jab, or an insult, or the start of something gruelling. This time it's simply a bitter retelling of the events they both know to be true. There's no offence to be taken. George just has to shrug and take it.

"I know, I shouldn't have done that" he says, quiet—the mantra numb as it skates across his lips. "I have no idea why I thought that would work out."

Humourless. A laugh that falls before it floats.

"George," Sappnap says, like they aren't in the middle of a conversation, like this is the beginning of it all. "Can I ask you a question?"

And George has no reason not to say yes, they're already here, aren't they?

"Of course."

"Why do you like Dream?"

For a moment, it stuns him. A second later, he settles.

*Do*. Even the phrasing of it all seems intentional. *Do* means present, now, not past. It means that as Sapnap looks at George, in this very second, this torn out fragment of time, he sees the glass look and finds his way past it, back to something he saw so very long ago. Except this time, he doesn't do it with red irises and a tone that does its best to burn. He does it calmly.

The end of the earth didn't come. The road still has so much more to show.

"We're talking about this already?" George chokes, through a laugh, through a grin. It's all put on but the other doesn't need to know that, or at the very least, doesn't need it spelt out for him.

"Better now than never," Sapnap shrugs. "Besides, I feel as though I deserve an answer to that at least, seeing as that's what caused everything."

The bluntness of it all manages to weave its way between his bones.

They're tense and they can't help themselves. It's familiar to the rest of their friendship, in a sense.

George's tongue is on the verge of bleeding, with how harshly he's biting down on it. "Sorry," is all he thinks he can say.

"I know you are." Sapnap responds without missing a beat. "I just want to know why you put *him* before us."

Validity often feels like razor blades, as it slices the open air.

"I can't explain it," George starts, because he can't. Every thought he has ever had must escape him in that moment, leave him empty and open and scrambling for something truthful to say. Because he can't lie, even though he has, now is not the time for lies. It's the time for him to take a breath, the moment that he pauses and thinks and feels his lips grow chapped.

Have they always been like that? Why now?"

"Can you try?" Sapnap asks.

It's not pushing if George starts to speak before he even finishes his thought. "I don't know," he continues. A breath. A pause. "It's like— I can't really describe it, it was strange."

The words mix together on his tongue, scrambling themselves to avoid being deciphered.

"It kind of just felt like a crush, in a way. A crush that never managed to fizzle out. Like— like he was a lot, at times, and it was different, but not *too* different, just different enough that being around him felt like so much all at once, it was overwhelming, almost. Overwhelming."

Sapnap is looking at him. George can't seem to close his mouth.

"Like sometimes, he'd come over and he'd just want to sit in silence, and I never really knew what he meant. He'd find his way up my window, and he'd annoy me until I paid attention to him, and even if it was intense I didn't feel like I was drowning. He had this funny way of making it feel like even in such a short amount of time I really knew him, like he knew me and he didn't care how fucked up some of the things in my head were, because he didn't care if we got caught or if I didn't feel like talking, he just wanted to be there. He just wanted to be close to me."

A laugh, too fond to play off as anything else.

"I guess he just made me feel cared about. That's— that's it really. All the dumb dates and the

holding hands and the things I'd never really done before, he wanted to show me, and he didn't really care if I wasn't good at it. He just liked me. He— he was nice.”

The inhale of air that follows the words is calculated, enough so that he doesn't shatter right then and there.

Because it's rambling and it's awkward and George will cringe at himself in five seconds for even letting that much slip, but at the back of his mind he knows that even now as he pieces each part together and ships them away, there's still more that he could have said.

That Dream was like freedom. He was a rush in the simplest sense. Hands that touched and lips that curved, and eyes that made everything seem worth it. The red and the blue and the fucking emptiness that followed it all.

He was the bump in the road—the one that tipped the wheel to throw him off course, then reeled him back in with the promise of less potholes. The arms that held him against the side, the smile that creased with pointed piercings, and ultimately George's demise.

“That's dumb though, right?” He breathes, trying to smooth the surface with words he's still having to force down. “Clearly he didn't like me as much as I liked him.”

“Don't say that,” Sapnap interjects.

“Why not? It's true, isn't it?” George scoffs. The bite is back, cherry red and fuelled by all the things he shouldn't think. Emotion, strong and heavy, blinding in its own particular sense. *God*, he said he was over this, he said he could stop. “You told me yourself, he was just doing it all to hurt you. It's not like he actually cared. I was his fun little game that he could throw away once he was done.”

If constellations can die, so can the brightness in Sapnap's eyes. “Don't give up so easily,” he says, slow, calculated. Almost as though, even if this is a struggle to get out, he still feels he should say it. “I think...” A pause. “...I think that some of that stuff I just made up to make myself feel better.”

For a moment George doesn't understand. Not all of it quite manages to click.

But Sapnap hangs his head and smiles so forcibly that it splits his lips apart, sitting on the ground, with nothing to do other than explain. “That way I could say he was a dickhead and really mean it.”

“But you told me—”

“I know what I said,” Sapnap cuts him off, hands touching sleeves, knuckles growing white with tension. “And most of it is true. Dream and I haven't had a great last few months, but he never brought someone over—when you guys were together—he's not a cheater.”

“He's still a liar.”

“Actually, I don't know if he is.”

The feeling gnawing at the inside of George's chest is indescribable. “Can we stop talking about this?” He asks, more flustered than he'd like to be.

“Sorry.”

Somehow, the other sounds as though he really means it.



There's a certain oddness to these minutes. An undiscovered element that's managing to knock everything off course. In these moments, George has to pinch himself, on the arm, only lightly, just to determine whether this is all real. If this is happening or just a product of an overactive imagination.

So much time by himself has managed to fuck with him a little, he thinks. The part of his brain that was so open to danger and fun, and all the hurt that it might bring, now trying to push him down, keep him sitting in a little box that'll stop the outside air from nipping at his skin.

Blatant anger shouldn't be pushed onto people undeserving of it, but sometimes, George thinks he owes it to himself not to just sit. There are few things on his mind, only some he manages to keep down.

"I think I hate you," he questions, unbalanced in his own brain. "Is that wrong?"

He thinks it's wrong. It feels wrong.

But against everything, Sapnap shakes his head. "No," he murmurs. Like finality is that simple. "I'd hate me too, if I were you."

Their silences are earned. Their quiet times follow loud.

"I'm sorry that you're in love with me," George admits, eventually. "And that I can't love you back."

Unsurprisingly, it's something that's been thinking for a while—the thing that makes all the guilt feel earned.

Love is a strong word. Sometimes the concept is hard to define, unclear when explained and hard to even distinguish once shown. Ignorance can only take him so far, friendship one thing, and this another. George doesn't feel that way. He can't force himself to either.

"It's fine," Sapnap tells him. "I'll get over you." And then he smiles, wide and mocking, far too reminiscent to seem anything other than fond. "I deserve better anyway."

And the laugh that tears itself from between George's lips is so stark he catches himself off-guard.

"Besides, we're only young," Sapnap shrugs, justifying it to himself in a way he doesn't think George will recognise. (Though he does—twisted features will always be easy to read.) "College will be different."

"It will?"

There's an edge of scorn to his tone, questioning that makes it seem born from disbelief.

"Yeah," Sapnap grins. "Maybe then we'll find people that actually want us."

*Want.*

Want is such a tricky subject. George thinks that he could live a thousand years and never understand the ethics of fleeting want. He *wants* to be around Sapnap, likes being around him too, but the waters they stand on are wavering, and he doesn't know if struggling under the tide is something he plans to do today.

It almost feels simple now that they're here, talking. Like everything prior to this was meaningless,

a build up to something so easy they could have done it long before. Nevertheless, George can respect the time it took to get here. Not everything can come wrapped up neat in a little gift box, sometimes, they have to wait. And then, when they get the chance, ask the things they're dying to know.

George wants to know a lot of things.

He'll start off with the basics first though.

"We're friends, right?"

George almost regrets the words once he's spoken, blue nerves lacing around his tongue that force him to wait. To panic.

He sees Sapanp stiffen, watching his expression shift out of the corner of his eye.

"Can we be?" He asks, tense shoulders, diverted eyes. "How are you meant to come to my house if *he's* there? That won't end well."

"On my part or his?"

"Both," Sapanp shrugs. "You guys are fucked at the moment."

"And who's fault is that?"

George bites his tongue almost immediately. The way that resentment creeps up his spine is unheard of, daggers in his spine, claws dragging down his back. It's the darkest of feelings and the most silent fall, but George still doesn't fully know how to stop himself.

Perhaps a part of him will always blame Sapanp for it all.

"Sorry," he says, pale blue words circling light in the air. "That was uncalled for."

"No it wasn't," Sapanp corrects. "It's fine if you're mad."

"I'm not mad," he says, because he's not. Anger is a feeling that passed so long ago, dulling out and becoming mellow inside of his chest. "I just didn't think things would end up like this."

For a moment, Sapanp doesn't answer. Quiet in a way that only signals danger. There's a silent question on the tip of his tongue: *then how were you expecting things to turn out?* But he doesn't say it. Holding back is so much easier than destroying the ground that they walk on, when the soil is already mush.

"I get that," Sapanp nods.

It's spitting.

When rain comes, George almost expects it to scream.

There is an unknown nausea to the air. A whirlwind that runs and drags and descends with the falling rain. If Sapanp wanted to move then George would invite him in—he thinks—if the other raised a complaint then he'd surely get over himself and lean back into the door. But Sapanp, content as it seems, says nothing that indicates he's uncomfortable, letting his hair get wet and his features get blurred, even if the fall is only light.

(On any other day, he probably wouldn't even notice the rain. Now, when he's finally trying to pay

attention to his own thoughts, it seems it's all he can focus on.)

"I still want to be friends though," he admits, soft in tone and mellow in voice. "Even if I can't come over because *he's* there."

Maybe seeing Dream, in his own home, unfazed by the passing of time, could hurt more than it could heal. Still, George won't be giving up his life just because the boy who broke his heart has to live his at the same time.

The collar of his shirt feels too close to his neck. He uses a small grip to pull it away.

Sapnap watches the movement. His question follows no other.

"Will you ever get over him?"

And George smiles, for better or for worse he lets pink lips stretch out into a saccharine gleam. Not forced, or strained or anything of the sort. A simple smile. One that Sapnap is welcome to see as George lets his arms sit over his legs.

It's such a fragmented slot of time, so jarring that it could almost be considered odd that there are no faces wandering down the street, enjoying the light, enjoying their lives.

On the step below his door, George and Sapnap sit in partial silence, collecting their thoughts.

Moving on is harder said than done, especially when there's a reminder of the guy that never truly cared, everywhere he goes.

If he closes his eyes, there are black snake bites in his memory. If he thinks back to sleepovers at Sapnap's house and movies that were never really hooking enough to watch, there is dirty blond hair and a smile, pink and cunning, within his grasp. It is awful and amazing at the same time, because that's not something that can be scratched from his thoughts, but when there's the ghost of light touches tracing along the small of his back he almost wonders what things would be like if he never found out.

If Dream would ever actually tell him the truth.

The good was always good though, and the fun from that simple danger, black as ash and as convoluted as the mess they've found themselves in, can never be replaced. No matter how badly George wishes they could be.

But then there's betrayal and bitter words.

When he next meets Sapnap's eye, the words are on the tip of his tongue, decided and final, because this is more of a confession than he'll ever make. This is following what the ache inside of his chest says, rather than the sense that tells him this cannot be a good idea.

George hangs his head low. "I don't think I want to."

## Chapter End Notes

comments/kudos are extremely appreciated !! <3

SORRY FOR THE WAIT OH MY GOD I HAD THE WORST WRITERS BLOCK  
AND IRL LIFE IS A LOT SOMETIMES, NEXT CHAPTER IS THE LAST TELL  
ME HOW U FEEL

HOPE THIS CHAPTER WAS WORTH IT AND YOU GUYS ENJOYED!!!

thank u to [flame](#) for beta-ing againn! And for continuously trying to get me to title  
drop, i would not have said the words 'without guilt' once without flame

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LEAVE COMMENTS AND KUDOS THEY MAKE MY DAY <33

Also 197k hits what the actual fuck hello????

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